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# Segmenting Publics

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September 2011

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# 1. Executive Summary

## Segmenting publics

This research synthesis was commissioned by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to examine audience segmentation methods and tools in the area of public engagement.

Highlights include:

- Identifying existing academic and professional literature on the use of segmentation methods in public engagement activities, including academic management and marketing studies, critical social science, and social marketing; and professional and 'grey' literatures on the use of segmentation in a variety of fields of public engagement activity.
- Examples of sectors currently using market segmentation for public engagement purposes which this Research Synthesis discusses include social marketing; public relations; environmental communication; science communication; public services; arts, culture and heritage; visitor studies; charity and non-profit marketing; campaigning; development communication.
- An outline of the key debates concerning the use of segmentation in public engagement activities. These include the shift towards using sophisticated motivational variables to identify segments; the theory/practice divide in academic literature on segmentation; and the importance of professional cultures and organisational capacities in explaining the proliferation and application of segmentation methods.
- Emerging trends in academic and non-academic discussions of segmentation and public engagement, including the importance of reflecting on the ethics of segmentation methods, the need for better evaluation of segmentation exercises, and the tensions between using segmentation to 'nudge' people towards change or using segmentation to engage people in 'talk' about issues and controversies.
- Identifying three organisational imperatives which drive the application of segmentation methods in public engagement contexts. Each of these imperatives has emerged in a wider context in which public engagement has become an increasingly professionalised field: concerns over *accountability*; concerns over *efficiency*; concerns over *legitimacy*.
- Each of these three imperatives is operative in the Higher Education sector. Identifying the different ways in which segmentation tools have been deployed as part of public engagement strategies to address these concerns in other sectors is relevant to assessing potentials and limitations of segmentation for public engagement benefit in higher education.
- The imperatives driving the application and translation of segmentation to public engagement issues has generated three fields of professional and practical innovation and theoretical reflection.

- Segmentation tools have been used as part of efforts to provide *better understandings of and responses to public opinion*. Segmentation tools are used as one aspect of increasingly sophisticated methodologies of audience insight and public engagement, combining quantitative and statistical analysis with qualitative experiments in deliberative dialogue and public participation.
- Segmentation tools are increasingly used in initiatives to *understand human behaviour and encourage behaviour change*. This field is led by policy makers and campaigning charities and NGOs, particularly in fields of public health and sustainability, and seeks to better understand how individual's behaviour can be influenced to contribute to aggregate changes for public benefit.
- Segmentation tools are used as part of efforts to generate *better understandings of informal learning processes* upon which successful engagement depends. This application is evident in cultural fields such as the Museums, Libraries, and Archives sector, and in research on visitor engagement in audience studies, in which an emphasis on the cultural and emotional dynamics of identification and engagement is supplementing cognitive understandings of learning.

## Segmentation and public formation – findings

- There is currently no academic synthesis of the research and practice on the use of segmentation tools across the full range of public engagement activities.
- There is an absence of research into the *processes of translation* through which market segmentation is applied and transformed in public engagement contexts.
- A key driver in the proliferation of segmentation tools beyond commercial settings is the development of technically advanced systems of Customer Relationship Management and related data-mining systems, and the associated development of more dynamic models of the *motivations* of the subjects of both market exchange and public engagement activities.
- Segmenting methods can be used for *discriminatory* or *diversifying* purposes, both of which under certain circumstances can be consistent with public interest values.
- Segmentation methods can be deployed as part of engagement initiatives which aim to inform *behaviour change* or to inform *deliberative engagement*.
- Segmentation methods are instrumental to *finding* out about publics and to processes of *making* publics.
- The use of segmentation methods raises a range of ethical issues which are relevant to public engagement practitioners.

## Issues in market segmentation - findings

- Recent academic research on market segmentation focuses on the practice of 'doing market segmentation'.
- Conceptualisations of the disjuncture between the theory and practice of segmentation no longer assume that the problem is simply one of barriers and impediments to diffusion.
- This research brings to light the importance of organisational cultures in shaping the outcomes of segmentation exercises.
- A significant issue arising from this field is the importance of reflecting on the theoretical assumptions and models which are used to inform data collection and data analysis; in so far as these provide the explanatory shape generated by descriptive statistical methodologies such as cluster analysis used in 'off-the-shelf' segmentation systems.
- There is no equivalent body of academic research using qualitative methodologies to assess the practices of market segmentation in public engagement activities.
- These findings from management studies and marketing theory are relevant in so far as discussion of market segmentation in public engagement contexts often tends to focus on the choice of appropriate variables; tends to assume the benefits of applying segmentation methods; and is proliferating in the absence of sustained research assessing the organisational dynamics of successful segmentation activities in public engagement contexts.
- Critical social science emphasises the processes of 'construction' through which publics are made by segmentation and targeting practices. This tradition highlights a set of ethical issues arising from the application of segmentation methods in public engagement activities.
- There is little existing research examining the issues of ethics, evaluation, and reputational risk involved in organisations charged with various public responsibilities undertaking segmentation exercises.

## Segmentation and public value - findings

- Segmentation is used in the commercial sector, to target ethical consumers and grow markets for sustainable products.
- Segmentation is used by a variety of government and non-government agencies to develop effective communications strategies around various sustainability campaigns.
- In terms of public engagement, both of these fields focus on processes of *informing* people, with the objective of changing people's behaviour in terms of purchasing decisions or shifting them to adopt new practices.
- There is a tension in using segmentation methods to divide publics up into distinct groups in the name of delivering 'public value', which is meant to be inclusive, collectively shared, or universal.

- There is a tension in using segmenting to determine what publics 'want' and organisational responsibilities to provide services that meet individual, community, and public 'needs'.
- There is a tension between using segmentation methods as part of behaviour change initiatives and using segmentation methods as part of more deliberative strategies of engagement.
- Segmentation methods can be used in strategies aimed at changing behaviour in relation to pre-established objectives, and in strategies which aim to engage people in the definition of issues and problems as well.
- There is little existing research examining the conceptual, methodological, and practical similarities and differences between segmenting markets and segmenting publics.

## Segmentation in public engagement practice – findings

- Academic research in particular fields informs the definition of variables used in segmentation exercises, and is used to evaluate the success of segmentation exercises in helping to meet public engagement objectives.
- Segmentation methods can be used in public engagement activities as part of broader strategic rationales, including behaviour change, visitor engagement, campaigning, and planning of communications.
- Investigating the strategic rationalities and purposes of public engagement that segmentation methods have been used to support can provide useful analogies for the different strategic purposes driving debates about public engagement and higher education.
- The use of segmentation models in public engagement activities involves complex processes of data gathering and analysis.
- The use of segmentation methods is just one part of broader strategies of generating policies, applying techniques, and designing effective interventions.
- There is an identifiable shift away from thinking about public engagement in terms of a 'deficit model' aimed at better processes of informing people about issues and choices.
- Segmentation methods are used differently in relation to fields in which the aim is to inform people about practices they might adopt in support of issues around which there is a broad positive consensus, compared to fields in which issues and objectives are either more complex or contentious, where there is likely to be more emphasis on deliberation and consultation.
- While the aim of the segmentation methods is to generate relatively stable images of public attitudes and values, the increasing emphasis on 'motivational' factors indicates that segmentation methods are primarily deployed to 'generate movement': to change people's attitudes, increase public support, alter behaviour, and overcome barriers and impediments.
- Segmentation methods are not merely 'descriptive' devices; they are normative in the sense that their design and application is always shaped by the broader purposes of public engagement strategies of which they are one aspect.

- Across different fields of public engagement, the methodological and analytical emphasis in segmentation exercise is increasingly oriented towards the development of dynamic, motivational variables to generate segments.
- There is relatively little academic research which seeks to understand the proliferation of segmentation methods in public engagement contexts.
- There is little academic research comparable to that emerging in management studies and marketing theory which seeks to understand the practice of segmentation in public engagement contexts.
- There is an absence of research on the role and potential of segmentation methods in supporting the public engagement objectives of the higher education sector.

## Conclusion: public segmentation and higher education

This Research Synthesis provides resources for assessing the ways in which segmentation tools might be used to enhance the various activities through which models of public engagement in higher education are implemented – activities that range from informing, to consulting, to collaborating.

Understanding the opinions, values, and motivations of members of the public is a crucial feature of successful engagement. Segmentation methods can offer potential resources to help understand the complex set of interests and attitudes that the public have towards higher education.

There exist a number of existing segmentations which address many of the areas of activity found in Universities and HEIs. These include segmentations which inform strategic planning of communications; segmentations which inform the design of collaborative engagement activities by Museums, Galleries, and Libraries; and segmentations that are used to identify under-represented users and consumers.

Segmentation is, on its own, only a tool, used in different ways in different contexts. The broader strategic rationale shaping the application and design of segmentation methods is a crucial factor in determining the utility of segmentation tools.

There are four issues of particular importance which emerge from the synthesis of research on segmentation in other fields which are of relevance to the higher education sector:

1. Segmentation exercises are costly and technically complex. Undertaking segmentations therefore requires significant commitment of financial and professional resources by HEIs; the appropriate interpretation, analysis, and application of segmentation exercises also require high levels of professional capacity and expertise
2. Undertaking a segmentation exercise has implications for the internal organisational operations of HEIs, not only for how they engage with external publics and stakeholders
3. Segmentation tools are adopted to inform interventions of various sorts, and superficially to differentiate and sometime discriminate between how groups of people are addressed and engaged.



4. For HEIs, the ethical issues and reputational risks which have been identified in this Research Synthesis as endemic to the application of segmentation methods for public purposes are particularly relevant.

There are various areas of possible future research into segmentation in public engagement including:

- how and why segmentation methods are translated across policy areas and professional fields is required.
- research into the practices of 'doing segmentation' in public engagement contexts is required, equivalent to leading-edge research on the practice of segmentation in commercial settings undertaken in management studies and marketing theory.
- research, assessment, and evaluation of the extent of the use of segmentation in HEIs are required.
- research and evaluation into the conceptual and methodological issues involved in using segmentation tools in public engagement activities is required, including research on the use and analysis of different forms of data and the implications of digitalization for the generation of sophisticated segmentations of motivations and values.
- research into how the applications of segmentations in public engagement activities are evaluated in practice is required.

## 2. Introduction: segmentation and public formation

### i. The context for this review

This Research Synthesis provides an overview of the principles and imperatives behind the increasing use of market segmentation tools for public engagement purposes. It seeks to outline the key issues raised by applying techniques and methodologies developed in for-profit commercial sectors to non-profit and public activities. *Market segmentation* is a practice of dividing markets up into homogenous 'segments' of consumers or customers. The members of any given segment are assumed to respond to communication or to behave in the same way. In marketing theory, segmentation is one step in a broader process which includes the targeting of messages or advertising campaigns to specific segments.

There is currently no existing overview of the proliferation of segmentation methods in public engagement activities. This Research Synthesis fills this gap by analysing the issues raised when methods and technologies developed in commercial settings of marketing and public relations are translated to the public sector, to the third sector, and to non-profit sectors. This Research Synthesis provides a review of the use of market segmentation technologies and other segmentation methods for the purposes of public engagement, with the aim of identifying the key issues that are raised when considering the value of deploying these tools in Higher Education contexts.

The Research Synthesis is the outcome of a review of research commissioned by the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) in 2010. The Research Synthesis is not intended as a 'How to' guide to the use and application of segmentation methods.<sup>1</sup> Rather, it provides an analysis of the issues that arise from the use of segmentation methods in various sectors in which imperatives of public engagement are now strongly felt, and which in different ways might be considered to be analogous to the Higher Education sector.

This Research Synthesis locates the deployment of segmentation tools in this wide range of contexts in the changing dynamics of various 'public' issues, including public health, development aid, environmental issues, climate change, 'personalisation' agendas, and public service reform. The Research Synthesis identifies three organisational imperatives which drive the application of segmentation methods in public engagement contexts. Each of these imperatives has emerged in a wider context in which public engagement has become an increasingly professionalised field:

1. Concerns over *accountability*, driven by demands that institutions in receipt of public funding or other support, or with clearly defined public roles, should be more open, responsive, and transparent.
2. Concerns over *efficiency*, driven by the widely held belief that established approaches to public communication have not been working effectively, as well as by wider concerns to improve the efficiency of public organisations in delivering their publicly mandated remit and services.

3. Concerns over *legitimacy*, driven by a perception that institutions are vulnerable to losing touch with the cares and needs of the customers, clients, or audiences upon whose support they depend.

An assumption of this Research Synthesis is that each of these three imperatives is operative in the Higher Education sector, given the complexity of the contemporary University as a public actor. Therefore, identifying the different ways in which segmentation tools have been deployed as part of public engagement strategies to address these concerns in other sectors is relevant to assessing potentials and limitations of segmentation for public engagement benefit in higher education.

Broadly speaking, each of these three concerns or imperatives driving the application and translation of segmentation to public engagement issues has generated three fields of professional and practical innovation and theoretical reflection:

1. In response to accountability imperatives, segmentation tools have been used as part of efforts to provide *better understandings of and responses to public opinion*. Segmentation tools are used as one aspect of increasingly sophisticated methodologies of audience insight and public engagement, combining quantitative and statistical analysis with qualitative experiments in deliberative dialogue and public participation.
2. In response to efficiency imperatives, segmentation tools are increasingly used in initiatives to *understand human behaviour and encourage behaviour change*. This field is led by policy makers and campaigning charities and NGOs, particularly in fields of public health and sustainability, and seeks to better understand how individual's behaviour can be influenced to contribute to aggregate changes for public benefit.<sup>2</sup>
3. In response to legitimacy imperatives, segmentation tools are used as part of efforts to generate *better understandings of informal learning processes* upon which successful engagement depends. This application is evident in cultural fields such as the Museums, Libraries, and Archives sector, and in research on visitor engagement in audience studies, in which an emphasis on the cultural and emotional dynamics of identification and engagement is supplementing cognitive understandings of learning.

Examples of sectors currently using market segmentation for public engagement purposes which this Research Synthesis discusses include social marketing; public relations; environmental communication; science communication; public services; arts, culture and heritage; visitor studies; charity and non-profit marketing; campaigning; development communication. In each of these sectors, different combinations of these three sets of imperatives and responses can be identified.

In elaborating on the different fields and different purposes in which segmentation tools are used, this Research Synthesis identifies a recurring tension between the use of segmentation in engagement projects shaped by ideas of behaviour change and 'nudging' people to alter their practices on the one hand, and the use of segmentation as part of more broadly 'dialogic' or 'deliberative' styles of public engagement.

While there is an extensive academic literature on market segmentation in marketing theory and management studies, there is no existing synthesis of academic research on the proliferation of segmentation methods in public engagement activities. In light of this gap, this Research Synthesis has three aims:

1. It identifies and synthesises the literature on segmentation across a range of academic fields;
2. It outlines the nature of the debates about the use of segmentation in both academic and non-academic fields;
3. It highlights emerging trends and issues in both academic and non-academic fields.

In addressing these aims, the Research Synthesis seeks to establish an agenda for further empirical and theoretical research into understanding, assessing, and evaluating the proliferation of segmentation methods in various fields of public life.

## ii. Tracking segmentation in practice

The Research Synthesis is based on a critical review of publicly available materials, including academic literatures, marketing literatures, and government and non-governmental publications. It also includes selective review of 'grey' literature from government and non-governmental organizations and charities. The Research Synthesis is based primarily on desk-based research, including on-line searches, use of ISI web-based search resources, supplemented by review of materials available in the British Library. This research was supplemented by consultation by the authors with academic and non-academic networks connected to the Publics Research Programme in the Open University's Centre for Citizenship, Identities and Governance (CCIG).<sup>3</sup>

Methodologically, the Research Synthesis adopts a 'genealogical' approach to making sense of the proliferation of segmentation methods across different fields of public engagement. This approach seeks to understand where the segmentation methods used in contemporary public engagement activities come from, and in particular to ask what *problematizations* the application of segmentation methods are meant to provide responses to.<sup>4</sup> It is this approach that leads us to focus on the widespread adoption of segmentation methods as one response to perceived challenges faced by organisations of accountability, efficiency and legitimacy.

The genealogical approach we adopt here builds on a conceptual framework developed as one outcome of an ESRC Research Seminar Series on *Emergent Publics* (2008-2010).<sup>5</sup> This framework focuses on identifying the *subjects* of public practices – for example, whether publics are understood as singular or fragmented, or as consisting of consumers or citizens; and the *mediums* of public practices – for example, whether public practices take place in contained, physical spaces (like 'the street' or in institutions such as schools, libraries, or museums) or are distributed across various mediated spaces (television, internet, etc.).<sup>6</sup> Both of these issues are pertinent to understanding the widespread adoption of segmentation methods in public engagement activities.

An important feature of this analysis is the understanding of the forms of identification, differentiation, and exclusion involved in processes of public formation.<sup>7</sup> Thus this Synthesis identifies various subjects of 'the public' in uses of segmentation methods: sometimes the public is figured as 'customers', sometimes as 'citizens', or 'patrons', or 'visitors', or 'audiences'.

Likewise, segmentation methods are deployed as part of different styles of mediated public communication: sometimes to inform forms of engagement aimed at designing or 'nudging' people to new forms of behaviour; sometimes to inform strategies to engage people in more or less deliberative styles of activity.

The different types of subjects and mediums of public engagement activity for which segmentation methods are used are in turn, then, closely related to different *objects* of public practice: the use of segmentation in fields concerned with changing environmentally unsustainable behaviour, for example, is markedly different from uses in so-called community social marketing or in values-oriented styles of campaigning seeking to elicit public opinions and perspectives into the design of governmental policies or non-governmental programmes.

### iii. Market segmentation

#### Defining market segmentation

Understanding the role of segmentation tools in public engagement requires an appreciation of the theory and practice of market segmentation in commercial settings. While public segmentation is not necessarily a direct application of market segmentation methods, many of the techniques, assumptions, and strategic understandings of market segmentation are evident in the proliferation of segmentation tools in various public fields.

Market segmentation, at its simplest, is a practice of dividing markets up into homogenous 'segments' of consumers or customers. The members of any given segment are assumed to respond to communication or to behave in the same way. Segmentation is, then, in marketing theory, a step in a broader process which includes the *targeting* of messages or advertising campaigns to specific segments. As such, segmentation is a fundamental dimension of marketing practice, and has been for half a century at least. Importantly, in the commercial sector, market segmentation is based on the principle that firms should focus their attention on those groups of customers whose needs or desires they are best able to supply or satisfy with their offer.

In short, in this field, segmentation is explicitly *discriminatory*, in the sense that it is oriented by the imperative to divide a population up and to differentially supply different segments. This feature of segmentation methods is relevant for understanding the translation of segmentation in public engagement, where very often the imperative is not to divide in order to discriminate, but to recognize *diversity* in order to enhance inclusiveness. The tension between segmentation for discriminatory purposes and diversifying purposes is therefore central to understanding the translation of market segmentation into non-commercial contexts of public engagement.

#### Marketing theories of segmentation

Segmentation is both a long-established principle of marketing strategy, and also a topic of increased attention in recent debates and research in marketing studies. The Academy of Marketing pinpoints the potential for the application of marketing knowledge about segmentation to non-commercial sectors:

"The scope for market segmentation to cross disciplinary boundaries is also increasing. This is reflected in new applications in social marketing and in the use of profiling techniques, for example, in relation to anti-money laundering, healthy eating programmes and the securitisation of consumer data."<sup>8</sup>

In the context of this movement of segmentation from fields of marketing practice and marketing theory to other sectors, it is important to define some key characteristics of segmentation methods:

- Segmentation involves dividing of markets into discrete sub-sets characterised by particular tastes or values, with the express purpose of treating those sub-sets differently. Segmentation is defined as “the process of dividing customers up into groups (or segments) based on their product or service usage, buying behaviour, life style, location and so on”;
- In turn, segmentation techniques are “techniques for grouping customers in both consumer markets and organisational, industrial or business markets”;<sup>9</sup> and
- Segmenting markets is intimately related to *targeting* different groups with different types of communication.

In marketing studies<sup>10</sup>, segmentation is therefore related to a broader repertoire of competitive strategies aimed at identifying potentially profitable market segments:<sup>11</sup>

“Businesses are successfully using market segmentation to better reach profitable customers; libraries are successfully using market segmentation to better reach prospective underserved and underprivileged patrons. [...] Smart enterprises use segmentation to continually monitor, quantify, and qualify the changing customer, in part to stay ahead of the competition. Segmentation data provides organizations with information to develop timely goods and services that profitably serve customers, thereby sustaining the organization's growth and ability to compete with the development of new products and services.”<sup>12</sup>

As one facet of new systems of *Customer Relationship Management* (CRM), segmentation methods are premised on the assumption that not all customers are equally profitable, actually or potentially, to a business.<sup>13</sup> Segmentation and targeting are meant to enhance the competitive advantage of a business; are based on the principle that a business cannot be all things to all people, and that ‘some customers are not worth having’; and that the customers worth developing relationships with are in the most profitable segments.<sup>14</sup>

As part of CRM, segmentation methods are part of a broader trend for organisations to make use of new digital informational technologies to generate strategically useful data and knowledge about their customers, clients and constituencies.<sup>15</sup> Most segmentation systems used in the commercial sector and in public engagement activities are so-called ‘off the shelf’ – they are provided by commercial companies with appropriate expertise, often specializing in particular fields, such as public health or financial services. Amongst the leading providers of such systems are companies such as Accenture, TNS, and The Futures Company. Amongst the most widely used systems are the Tapestry segmentation provided by ESRI, and MOSAIC, provided by Experian. These sorts of segmentation systems combine multiple variables, are based on complex mathematical modelling principles, and often incorporate advanced techniques of spatial data analysis. Given the technical complexity and sophistication of segmentation tools, it is important to emphasise three issues:

1. The adoption of segmentation methods is normally undertaken for clearly defined strategic purposes;
2. Segmentations can be expensive and time-consuming; and
3. Segmentations normally involve significant reconfigurations of the internal and external orientations of organisations.

The basic principle behind the use of market segmentation methods in public engagement activities is that each segment or sub-group of a total population will respond to an ‘address’ in a similar fashion. In public engagement contexts, this

assumption can inform different strategic projects. The idea that people respond differently might be important in developing better targeting of services on those most 'in need', for example. In this case, the discriminatory deployment of segmentation methods remains important, without necessarily running counter to public interest principles of efficiency. Alternatively, the same idea can be used to develop organisational strategies that are alert to a diversity of perspectives, issues and interests. In this case, segmentation is used as part of a programme of public inclusion.

## Variables used in segmentation

Market segmentation methods use different *variables* to identify segments.<sup>16</sup> This includes **socio-demographic** variables: such as age, class, gender, educational attainment. Closely related to these variables are various types of **geo-demographic** variable, providing information about the location of members of different segments. This sort of information is often accessible through publicly available sources, most obviously through census data. These 'who' and 'where' variables can, in turn be augmented by 'how' variables: various types of behavioural data on what people buy, how often they recycle, how often they visit a library or museum, how often they take the bus rather than drive a car, and so on.

This sort of information is usually generated through various types of social survey. The use of **behavioural** variables is indicative of more sophisticated uses of segmentation methods, and this sophistication is further enhanced by the increasing use of so-called **psycho-graphic** variables. This refers to data that provides insight into the beliefs, values, worldviews, and attitudes of population groups. The increasing use of this type of 'why' variable is a distinctive feature of recent uses of segmentation methods in public engagement activities. Psychographic segmentation is also based on survey data, of opinions, interests and activities, but seeks to establish typologies based on values or lifestyle, and also opens space for consideration of emotional and affective dimensions of people's motivations.<sup>17</sup> Rather than focussing on static 'attitudes' or 'opinions' or 'interests', this focus on motivational factors is indicative of a more 'dispositional' understanding of individual behaviour.<sup>18</sup> For example, the National Centre for Social Marketing emphasises the importance of dynamic understandings of segmentation:

"The analysis of the different ways that a target audience can be divided in order to effectively tailor intervention methods and approaches. Social marketing does not use a single way to segment an audience but instead explores and considers the different ways this might be done. It moves beyond using only traditional 'targeting' approaches (such as demography and epidemiology) to include psychographic factors and understanding where people are in relation to a given behaviour (such as: in denial; strongly resisting; willing but feeling difficulty; and willing but not yet achieving)."<sup>19</sup>

The increasing importance of motivational variables is, then, related to the development of segmentation methods which are better attuned to grasping the *dynamism* of segments, rather than assuming a fixed set of preferences. This is a defining feature of the development of CRM, of which new segmentation methods are an integral part. The growth of CRM systems, dependent on the collection, collation and ongoing analysis of large data-sets on consumer behaviour, is oriented by an ideal goal of one-to-one marketing relationships (the so-called 'segment of one'), but in practice involves the development of more finely tuned, and dynamic models of customer segmentation.



The dynamism built into the most advanced segmentation methods points to another key issue identified in this Synthesis, which is the relation between 'found' and 'made' publics. While segmentation methods are often used to find out about pre-existing opinions or preferences, the development of dynamic modes of segmentation draws out the degree to which segmentation methods are used as part of ongoing practices of communication, engagement and intervention which seek to change the opinions, preferences, and activities of publics. In short, segmentation methods are implicated in the making and re-making of publics. It is this that differentiates market segmentations from simple surveys or polls – they are explicitly designed and undertaken with the intention of informing interventions with the aim of bringing about changes in behaviour, attitude, activity, or opinion.

The implication of segmentation methods in *making publics* as well as *finding publics* raises a set of potentially contentious issues, related to the ethics of segmentation practices and their application to public engagement. Section 3 of this Research Synthesis reviews literature from management studies which considers the issues of the ethics and reputational risks involved in segmentation methods, and considers the relevance of this literature for understanding the limitations of applying segmentation tools to public engagement contexts.

## Section 2 summary

- There is currently no academic synthesis of the research and practice on the use of segmentation tools across the full range of public engagement activities.
- There is an absence of research into the *processes of translation* through which market segmentation is applied and transformed in public engagement contexts.
- A key driver in the proliferation of segmentation tools beyond commercial setting is the development of technically advanced systems of Customer Relationship Management and related data-mining systems, and the associated development of more dynamic models of the *motivations* of the subjects of both market exchange and public engagement activities.
- Segmenting methods can be used for *discriminatory* or *diversifying* purposes, both of which under certain circumstances can be consistent with public interest values.
- Segmentation methods can be deployed as part of engagement initiatives which aim to inform *behaviour change* or to inform *deliberative engagement*.
- Segmentation methods are instrumental to *finding* out about publics and to processes of *making* publics.
- The use of segmentation methods raises a range of ethical issues which are relevant to public engagement practitioners.



### 3. Issues in market segmentation

This section reviews academic literature on the use of segmentation methods in the public realm, including literature from management studies and marketing theory, as well as literature from critical social science. There are currently two fields of academic research in which segmentation methods are taken as an object of analysis. First, in empirical and theoretical debates in academic marketing research, the key issues to emerge are the divide between the normative value ascribed to segmentation methods in improving organisational performance, and organisational impediments to the adoption of segmentation in practice. This field of research also emphasises the degree to which segmentation methods are part of broader strategic agendas of organisations. Second, in critical social science literature, including critical marketing studies, a set of questions is raised about the ethical issues involved in segmenting, profiling, and targeting markets *and* publics. These are issues that any specific application of segmentation methods for public engagement should be cognizant of.

A shared emphasis across these two fields of academic research is that segmentation methods are not value-neutral. The emphasis in academic research on segments and groups being the product of available data sources and segmentation analytics directs attention to important questions about the definition of the subjects of public engagement practices which adopt segmentation methods. The academic literature also emphasises the importance of specifying the objectives of engagement practices in which segmentation methods are used, which can range from generating knowledge about public attitudes or behaviour, to seeking to inform and educate publics, through to attempts to actively engage publics in problem-definition and decision-making processes.

#### i. Research on segmentation in management studies

In management studies, research on market segmentation has come to focus on a number of key issues. In particular, there is an increasing focus on the gap between the *theory* of market segmentation and evidence of the *practice* of market segmentation in actual business contexts. While segmentation has been ascribed a normative value in mainstream academic marketing theory, research on the theory/practice divide indicates a split between 'managerialist' and 'social science' strands of marketing theory.

#### Using 'off-the-shelf' segmentation tools

One set of issues raised in academic literature relates to the organisational contexts in which market segmentation tools are adopted. As already indicated in Section 2 above, both the commercial sector and organisations in public engagement activities tend to use 'off the shelf' segmentation systems. These are provided by commercial companies with appropriate expertise, often specializing in particular fields, such as public health or financial services. These segmentation systems combine multiple variables, are based on complex mathematical modelling principles, and often incorporate advanced techniques of spatial data analysis.

'Off-the-shelf' statistical packages for segmentation can give the impression that market segmentation is a straightforward and 'objective' exercise. However, questions have been raised in academic research over whether managers understand the complexity of the methodologies used in segmentation. For

example, many segmentation systems use cluster analysis, as part of broader CRM marketing strategies. Cluster analysis is a statistical approach for analysing multivariate data, and is the means by which clusters of similar customers are arranged into segments sharing similar characteristics and differentiated from one another.<sup>20</sup> Cluster analysis is a means of organizing observable data into meaningful form, by producing taxonomies by grouping objects of similar kinds in distinct categories. It is a method used across scientific and social scientific fields, and in many areas of everyday practice, from medicine to retailing:

"In other words cluster analysis is an exploratory data analysis tool which aims at sorting different objects into groups in a way that the degree of association between two objects is maximal if they belong to the same group and minimal otherwise. Given the above, cluster analysis can be used to discover structures in data without providing an explanation/interpretation. In other words, cluster analysis simply discovers structures in data without explaining why they exist."<sup>21</sup>

The point above about the absence of explanatory power in cluster analysis is an important issue in relation to the use of segmentation methods. There is debate in management studies about whether cluster analysis generates robust segments<sup>22</sup>, given that cluster analysis inevitably involves a dimension of subjectivity in the initial classification of groups or characteristics. This is an aspect of segmentation methods which is easily hidden when these methods are presented as one part of data-mining and management tools.<sup>23</sup>

The use of cluster analysis in segmentation systems illustrates how the identities and characteristics ascribed to members of different groupings, as well as the principles on which segments are differentiated, are in part dependent on the technical features of research methodologies used in segmentation practices (which frequently combine quantitative and qualitative methods). These methods produce patterns and groupings based on criteria that are produced externally to the data *per se* – this is an issue of increasing importance as segmentation methods increasingly adopt more dynamic variables based on attitudes, motivations, and values.

The importance of being able to conceptualise and track *dynamism* is increasingly recognised in research on market segmentation. This recognition follows in part from the increasing sophistication of CRM approaches. The shift to conceptualising and capturing 'segment instability' has prompted a focus on new variables and has been enabled in large part by developments in information and data-analysis technologies.<sup>24</sup> In particular, improvements in data capture and data management systems enabled by digitalization permits, in some business sectors at least, the development of ever more refined segments of customers.<sup>25</sup>

Discussions of data capture and data management in academic management studies therefore raise issues for public engagement practitioners concerning the availability, cost and capacity of organisations to undertake effective segmentation.

## Theory and practice in market segmentation

Technical issues of data collection, analysis, and management are closely related to broader questions concerning the conceptualisation of how market segmentation works in practice. These questions have increasingly become the focus of attention in academic research on market segmentation. There is an increasing acknowledgement that the normative assumptions of marketing theory

take little account of the organisational capacities which determine how segmentation methods are deployed in practice.<sup>26</sup> These include:

1. the assumption that segments are associated with stable preferences of customers;
2. the assumption that targeting segments leads to higher returns than mass marketing approaches.<sup>27</sup>

Whether these assumptions are supported by evidence, or whether segments might be unstable and constantly changing or whether targeting might be ineffective, has become a focus of attention in management studies research on segmentation.

Some academic researchers argue that market segmentation is a prescriptive norm in marketing theory:

“Conventional segmentation theory has, therefore, been founded on conceptual, rather than empirical evidence, based on how organisations should segment their markets, rather than considering how they actually construct homogeneity in the marketplace”.<sup>28</sup>

The implication of this argument is that conceptualisations of market segmentation need to integrate understandings of the organisational contexts of segmentation practices into analysis of the limits and potentials of these tools.<sup>29</sup>

Research on the theory/practice divide in market segmentation revolves around conceptualisations of the *diffusion* of segmentation, *barriers* to adoption, and organisational *impediments*. This is indicative of the degree to which market segmentation continues to be ascribed normative value in a great deal of management and marketing research. Two sets of issues emerge from this research: first, as noted above, a set of technical questions about data systems, financial costs, and personnel resources; and second, a set of broader issues concerning the organisational structures and corporate cultures in which segmentation methods operate. It is worth focussing on this second set of issues because they resonate with questions relevant to public engagement in higher education contexts.

In principle, market segmentation is meant to help businesses target customers with similar purchasing needs, habits, and behaviours. It follows that those businesses that make use of market segmentation would be a competitive advantage, out performing those which did not. This is the assumption that lies behind the “the pervasiveness of marketing segmentation as a normative approach to developing marketing strategy”.<sup>30</sup> However, leading-edge academic research indicates that the use of market segmentation in businesses is much more complicated than this picture suggests. Dibb *et al*<sup>31</sup> observe that marketing academics tend to assume that market segmentation is much more valuable than do managers of businesses. They raise two related issues; first, managers tend to think of market segmentation as being most useful in improving understanding of customers; second there is less agreement on whether it is possible to demonstrate a link between market segmentation and organisational performance. These researchers conclude that assessing the ‘success’ of campaigns based on market segmentation is methodologically difficult. The exact relationship between the ‘internal’ uses of segmentation methods and ‘external’ performance is an important consideration in assessing the value of segmentation methods.

So far, we have seen that the organisational benefits of market segmentation are widely accepted in mainstream marketing theory and management studies. Importantly, these benefits are assumed to outweigh the considerable resource commitments, in financial and personnel terms, which undertaking segmentation exercises can involve. As we have indicated, since the 1990s, a series of more critical strands of social science research questions in management studies and marketing have reassessed this normative model of market segmentation. These include issues concerning the nature of data analysis, statistical methodologies, and the variables used to generate segments. These technical issues are related to an increasing attention on the internal dynamics of market segmentation in organisations. The most recent theme of research on market segmentation is a concern with 'doing market segmentation', often involving qualitative research using ethnographic case studies of how market segmentation works in practice.<sup>32</sup>

This research brings to light the importance of organisational cultures in shaping the adoption, implementation, and outcomes of market segmentation tools. Recognising that organisations are internally complex, research on these issues focuses attention on the ways in which resource commitments need to be justified and potential benefits evidenced. The key lesson to emerge from these studies is that the adoption of market segmentation tools can have significant, and potentially unanticipated, strategic consequences for the internal and external operations of organisations.

The qualitative 'turn' in recent research on market segmentation is indicative of important debates about the nature and authority of marketing knowledge.<sup>33</sup> This qualitative research on the practical implementation of segmentation exercises is that it further underscores the complex relationship between market segmentation as a normative model of organisational strategy and the actual functioning of segmentation methods in practice.<sup>34</sup> At present, there is no equivalent body of academic research using qualitative methodologies to assess the practices of market segmentation in public engagement activities. Any use of segmentation for public engagement purposes should be cognizant of academic debates about the normative assumptions, practical applications, and empirical difficulties of assessing market segmentation tools.

## Managing segmentation in practice

We close this section by underscoring the key lesson to emerge from recent academic management and marketing research on market segmentation in the commercial sector. The emphasis on examining the disjuncture between the theory and practice of segmentation has moved beyond a concern only with understanding barriers and impediments, which leave the normative assumptions of market theory in place. Leading-edge academic research on these issues does not suppose that the challenge is simply to find ways of 'correctly' applying market segmentation in practice, as if the recognition of barriers offered no challenge to the normative assumptions of marketing theory:

"There remains little practical advice within the marketing literature (while there is a wealth of conceptual and theoretical discussion) prescribing how to meet the challenge of choosing variables, identifying segments, analysing the output, measuring segment profitability, or detailing how this process can be followed by managers. With no clear explanations regarding appropriate variable selection according to managerial requirements, the resulting situation leads to a position whereby segmentation pursuits may be ineffective, wholly unaccountable and, arguably, unnecessary given that there is no transparent way to account for, or to identify, their effectiveness."<sup>35</sup>

The lesson academic researchers draw from detailed studies of market segmentation in business practice is that the normative assumptions of market segmentation might require reconsideration. At the very least, this academic field of research is notable for indicating a shift of attention, away from an emphasis on the technicalities of creating segments (focussing on choice of variables), towards understanding in more detail how segmentation is managed in practice.<sup>36</sup> These findings are relevant in the present context, given the extent to which discussions of market segmentation in public engagement contexts tend to focus on the choice of appropriate variables; tend to assume the benefits of applying segmentation methods; and in the absence of sustained research assessing the organisational dynamics of successful segmentation activities in public engagement contexts.

## ii. Research on segmentation in critical social science

We have already noted that academic research on market segmentation in management studies and marketing theory can be divided between more applied or 'managerial' approaches and 'social science' approaches. Beyond management studies and marketing theory, market segmentation practices are also the focus of attention in critical social science. We take critical social science to refer to a range of research traditions that focus on understanding the dynamics of social processes in *diagnostic* terms. The particular relevance of research in this field to this Research Synthesis lies primarily in drawing into view a set of ethical and reputational issues involved in the application of segmentation methods to public engagement activities.

### Segmentation as a 'dividing practice'

One strand of argument in critical social science, most clearly articulated by media and communication theorist Oscar Gandy, is highly critical of the role of segmentation methods in contemporary public life. This critical perspective is informed by normative models of the public sphere and democratic citizenship. It holds that segmentation and targeting methods sourced from commercial marketing run against the grain of egalitarian and inclusive public sphere norms, precisely because they embody competitive strategies of the commercial world. Gandy's primary reference point is the use of segmentation methods in media and communications policy in the United States, in which segmentation methods are routinely used to divide audiences according to shared ethnic, gender, racial characteristics.<sup>37</sup> This form of **audience segmentation** is undertaken to construct audience as commodities, within a commercially organised radio and television system.

One important lesson of Gandy's research is to draw attention to how the use of segmentation methods in *commercial* fields of activity nevertheless has implications for the configuration of *public* life.<sup>38</sup> Gandy's perspective on segmentation and other 'dividing practices' is not just a critique of the application of marketing techniques to non-commercial, non-market sectors. It also involves a critique of the role of such practices in commercial marketing as well. Practices such as customer relationship management, dependent on data-mining of increasingly expansive, detailed, digitalized transactional data-bases to develop detailed differentiating profiles of 'whole populations'<sup>39</sup>, is instrumental in the exclusion of some classes of consumers from full participation in the marketplace and therefore from the public sphere in the fullest sense.<sup>40</sup>

Communication scholars have also drawn attention to the increasing use of market segmentation methods in another field of public life, that of political campaigning.

Once again, this practice is most advanced in the USA, although increasingly common in other national contexts:

"Populations are divided into smaller segments, presumably reflecting tastes, preferences, interests, needs, and propensities that bear some identifiable relationship to political issues. The rationale behind segmentation is that different backgrounds and interests, and perhaps even cognitive styles, require different sorts of persuasive appeals. It is rational, in that it makes good economic sense, to focus one's limited resources upon the most favorable prospects, and ignoring those who, if they can be moved at all, will only be moved at great cost."<sup>41</sup>

The next stage in political campaigning after segmentation is targeting, involving the delivery of tailored messages to particular groups of citizens.

From Gandy's perspective, the use of segmentation and targeting in political campaigns represents a threat to equal participation in the public sphere, understood as an ideal of inclusive, shared communication: "the logic of segmentation emphasizes the value of difference over the value of commonality".<sup>42</sup> Segmentation and targeting are understood as 'dividing practices' inimical to public sphere.<sup>43</sup>

## The ethics of segmentation

The relevance of this critical perspective on segmentation for considerations of the use of segmentation in public engagement activities is to underscore questions of ethics and reputational risk. Evidence suggests that marketing professionals are acutely aware of the sensitivity of customers and members of the public to the discovery that they are being counted, sorted, categorised, and targeted.<sup>44</sup> The application of segmentation methods is vulnerable to being perceived as unfair and manipulative, and if this is the case in commercial marketing, it is likely to be further enhanced in public engagement contexts.

An important contribution of critical social science research is on the difficult relationship between technologies used for organising the public realm which are also deployed for the surveillance of private lives.<sup>45</sup> A recurrent concern in critical social science is that sophisticated information and data-mining technologies about individual behaviours threatens to undermine public life by encouraging fragmented communications to discrete segments of 'the public'. New research focuses on the uses of consumer data drawn from CRM for various public purposes related of 'securitization', whether related to anti-terrorism strategy in travel and transport sectors or financial crime.<sup>46</sup> One issue that this translation of market segmentation methods to new fields of public life draws out is the extent to which CRM is inherently 'discriminatory', "in that it seeks to make organisations treat their customers differently based upon their personal characteristics or habits".<sup>47</sup> Critical management studies now focuses attention on the ethical implications of the use of CRM-sourced segmentation methods for various types of 'profiling'. These ethical issues include concerns raised by data-mining for the proprietary rights of personalised information, and the use of these in segmenting public communication strategies.<sup>48</sup>

One lesson of this emergent field of research on the ethics of segmentation methods is the idea that profiling technologies are not neutral techniques: ethical issues arise even in contexts in which they are deployed with the purpose of protecting vulnerable sections of the public or socially excluded customers.<sup>49</sup> It is important to recognise that segments are not naturally occurring entities, as Gandy puts it, but that they are "the product of theoretical models and analytical



techniques".<sup>50</sup> There are two aspects to this sense of the active construction or making of segments, whether in marketing or public engagement.

1. First, segmentation is proliferating across fields because it is becoming more and more possible to do, in a context of more sophisticated technologies for capturing, storing, and manipulating transactional data in particular.
2. Second, segmentation is shaped by theories of interest, motivation, and behaviour.

The proliferation of segmentation methods across diverse fields is, then, a prime example of what has been called 'the social life of methods'. This is a field of methodological research and knowledge production which is shaped by transformations in technologies, organisational forms, and social practices; at the same time as these methodologies help to re-configure social practices in new ways.<sup>51</sup>

From this perspective, segmentation methods might be understood as part of a 'new governmentality', referring to practices through which the rationalities and reasoning of populations are made known to governments, non-government agencies, and private actors so that they might better interact with those populations as citizens, volunteers, clients, consumers, customers, and so on.<sup>52</sup> For example, segmentation strategies are used to divide and target customers, using complex data mining and computer analysis systems, to re-shape relationships between individuals and markets around models of the informed, confident, empowered consumer.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, the same methods and strategies can be applied to public sector management, for example, in the classification practices used in e-government initiatives, which recast the citizen around the virtues usually ascribed to the consumer.<sup>54</sup> From this perspective, the segmentation of *publics* is related to a broader 'clientalization' of the population in relation to publics services, where new forms of classification enable new forms of relationships to be developed, which enact new public values of targeting, responsiveness to need, differentiation and personalisation.<sup>55</sup>

In this section, we have reviewed literature from critical social science that emphasises the processes of 'construction' through which publics are made. The relevance of this tradition of thinking in this context is that it emphasises a set of ethical concerns about the application of segmentation methods in different contexts.

## Section 3 summary

- Segmentation methods are not value-neutral. Segments are the product of available data sources and theoretical assumptions about motivations, interests, and identities.
- Recent academic research on market segmentation focuses on the practice of 'doing market segmentation'.
- Conceptualisations of the disjuncture between the theory and practice of segmentation no longer assume that the problem is simply one of barriers and impediments to diffusion.
- This research brings to light the importance of organisational cultures in shaping the outcomes of segmentation exercises.
- A significant issue arising from this field is the importance of reflecting on the theoretical assumptions and models which are used to inform data collection and data analysis; in so far as these provide the explanatory

shape generated by descriptive statistical methodologies such as cluster analysis used in 'off-the-shelf' segmentation systems.

- There is no equivalent body of academic research using qualitative methodologies to assess the practices of market segmentation in public engagement activities.
- These findings from management studies and marketing theory are relevant in so far as discussion of market segmentation in public engagement contexts often tends to focus on the choice of appropriate variables; tends to assume the benefits of applying segmentation methods; and is proliferating in the absence of sustained research assessing the organisational dynamics of successful segmentation activities in public engagement contexts.
- Critical social science emphasises the processes of 'construction' through which publics are made by segmentation and targeting practices. This tradition highlights a set of ethical issues arising from the application of segmentation methods in public engagement activities.
- There is little existing research examining the issues of ethics, evaluation, and reputational risk involved in organisations charged with various public responsibilities undertaking segmentation exercises.



## 4. Segmentation and public value

This section moves from reviewing existing academic research on market segmentation, to review issues arising from the application of market segmentation in areas where issues of public engagement are relevant. We first also explore issues relevant to public engagement which emerge from one of the fields in which segmentation is most well established, that of 'green', 'ethical' or 'sustainable' consumption. This is an area in which both public and private organisations seek to engage people in environmentally sustainable consumption practices, stretching from routine shopping decisions to the reconfiguration of domestic household space. Then we move on to consider debates about 'public value' in public sector management, which are relevant to understanding the contexts in which segmentation is applied for public engagement purposes. Our review of these two fields reveals the relationship between organisational form, technologies of engagement, and the delivery of public benefits to be a complex one.

### i. Applying segmentation to public issues

Marketing is an increasingly important feature of organisational strategies in many non-commercial contexts. For example, segmentation models are widely used in the charity and non-profit sector, to help identify likely volunteers or target potential donors.<sup>56</sup> In this section, we review two sectors in which segmentation methods have been adopted with the aim of engaging people in broadly defined citizenly activities: political marketing; and green, ethical and sustainable consumerism. These two fields provide examples of which aspects of segmentation methods translate to public engagement practices of different sorts, and which aspects do not necessarily translate. In these two areas of public engagement, segmentation methods are still closely connected to understandings of the subjects, mediums, and outcomes of public engagement derived from marketing models of consumer buying behaviour.

#### Segmentation in political marketing

In the use of segmentation methods in political marketing, the value of segmentation in establishing competitive advantage remains important. In this area of public engagement, the subject of engagement is still closely modelled on models of consumer buying behaviour. The use of segmentation in political marketing for non-partisan objectives, however, is an example of the use of segmentation methods to target specific groups in the name of broadly public, inclusive aims (increased voter participation).

The application of segmentation models of buyer-behaviour in political marketing is a long-standing practice. There are two key issues in the academic literature on segmentation in political marketing. The first is the role of segmentation in partisan campaigning, focussing on how political parties divide up and segment populations to target likely voters in the most effective ways. The use of segmentation is one aspect of a broader integration of marketing knowledge into political campaigning.<sup>57</sup> In this case, segmentation methods are used as a strategic tool for competitive advantage. At the same time, however, political 'segments' are notoriously unstable, limiting the degree to which segmentation methods can be applied for predictable outcomes.<sup>58</sup> The second key issue to emerge in this literature is the use of segmentation in less partisan political practices. The last two decades have seen increasing official concern about declining levels of participation in political life, usually expressed in terms of voter

turnout in elections. Segmentation methods have been deployed to identify social groups who are relatively under-represented in political practices, especially non-voters, in order to develop strategies to engage people more equally in political processes.<sup>59</sup> This type of use of segmentation is, then, closer to the increasing use of segmentation in public sector management, and especially in local government, where this trend is related to imperatives to be more efficient in the targeting of services on those most 'in need'.<sup>60</sup>

The literature on the use of segmentation in political marketing therefore illustrates the variability of strategic purposes to which this 'technology' can be applied: it is used as a tool for competitive advantage in partisan political campaigning, in which 'engagement' is modelled closely on consumer buying behaviour (i.e. voting is understood as analogous to choosing in the marketplace). And it is also used for more neutral public purposes, to provide information to government and non-government agencies charged with getting people to engage more fully in public life as citizens.

## Segmentation in green, ethical and sustainable consumerism

The use of segmentation in political marketing is an example of the use of competitive, individualising knowledge-technologies to enhance explicitly public processes – in this case, the competitive elections which are a basic feature of citizenship participation in liberal democracies. A similar application can be identified in the field of alternative retailing around green, ethical and sustainable consumerism. The use of segmentation methods in green, ethical and sustainable consumerism focuses on defining segments of 'consumers' in terms of attitudes to environmental sustainability, human rights, or global justice issues.

The use of segmentation methods by private sector retailing and advertising companies, non-profit campaign organisations, and non-departmental government agencies is widespread. In this field, segmentation is applied for commercial purposes as in any other sector of private business – to identify customer segments and to help design effective targeting strategies to grow market share. But this application is part of a broader institutional context in which market mechanisms and practices of consumer choice are mobilised as part of political movements seeking to reconfigure economic processes, built environments, and social life around public values of sustainability, justice and equality.<sup>61</sup> In this section we examine some of the features of the use of segmentation in the field of ethical consumption, broadly defined.

In 2007, the Guardian News and Media group commissioned a 'green consumer segmentation' to understand the extent of ethical consumerism, and to develop advertising strategies in response.<sup>62</sup> The segmentation exercise was undertaken by the Henley Centre (now the Futures Company), one of the leading providers of segmentation in the UK.<sup>63</sup> In this example of segmentation, segmentation methods are used to mediate the changing relationship between attitudes to sustainability and advertising strategy:

"Over the last five years a trend towards green and ethical consumption has been emerging that in the last few months has exploded into the hot marketing topic. Advertisers from every industry are featuring green and ethical messages in their campaigns. At the same time consumers are demanding that companies provide ethical goods and services and prove their green credentials but are also confused by conflicting messages in the media. It is a minefield for advertisers and careful consideration needs to be given to green marketing messages if they are to avoid being

accused of "green wash". In light of this, GNM have undertaken an extensive research project to find out the true extent of green consumerism in the UK and provide the industry with a clear framework to use when conveying their green messages."

The research for this green consumer segmentation was based on quantitative methods to produce 'ethical segments', based on responses to attitudinal factors (e.g. desire to live ethically, level of global concern) and behavioural factors (e.g. boycotting, buying local); and then used qualitative focus group research to "uncover how each segment should be communicated to with green messages".

The green consumer segmentation divided the UK population up into five categories.<sup>64</sup> These are 'onlookers', 'conveniently conscious', 'positive choosers', 'vocal activists', and 'principled pioneers'. These segments are differentiated by their disposition to adjust their consumer practices in relation to what are defined as 'ethical' issues (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: *Green consumer segmentation* (GNM and Henley Centre 2007)<sup>65</sup>**

**Onlookers – 26% of UK population:** This group is only moderately concerned about ethical and environmental issues. They don't have any particular desire to live ethically and only engage in very "easy" activities such as recycling. They feel that it is not their responsibility or don't feel empowered enough to make a change.

**Conveniently conscious – 35% of UK population:** This group is aware of, and fairly concerned about, environmental change and ethical issues. They think that other people should be penalised for not recycling, and companies for their unethical behaviour. They do the "easy" things like recycling and reducing water use, but are not interested in ethical consumption or local issues.

**Positive choosers – 31% of UK population:** This group is highly aware and concerned and feel guilty about their lifestyle. They desire to live ethically and regularly buy from "good" companies and boycott "bad" companies, supporting the local community is also very important to this group. However, they do not complain vocally.

**Vocal activists – 4%:** Like the positive choosers, this group is concerned, aware and taking a stand. However, they don't just live ethically but they also vocalise their discontent and are actively involved in action against climate change.

**Principled pioneers – 4%:** This group are the most committed, they take a proactive and whole-hearted approach to living a more ethical and green lifestyle, for example by installing alternative energy sources. They are very knowledgeable in environmental matters and actively seek out ways they can reduce their carbon footprint.

This segmentation is used to generate basic principles of 'creative messaging', including 'Don't lecture', 'Keep it upbeat', 'Provide a simple action', 'Avoid one-upmanship', and 'It's not always appropriate to lead with green'. These principles

are derived from the observation that a majority of the UK population in this exercise (consisting of Onlookers and Conveniently Conscious) are not strongly disposed to adjust their consumer practices in response to moralized messages about living ethically. This is an example, then, of segmentation being used to inform how communication strategies should be adjusted to the dispositions of particular segments of whole populations.

Segmentations of ethical or green consumers have become increasingly common over the last decade or so, as this sector of retail markets has continued to grow and as environmental sustainability and climate change have become major issues of public concern. For example, Marks and Spencer's *Plan A* programme, which is focussed on reconfiguring business activities around healthy food, ethical sourcing, climate change, and recycling, is also premised on a customer segmentation exercise. This exercise divided customers into four segments (See Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Marks and Spencer Segmentation.**<sup>66</sup>

**A: Green zealots** (people who will actively seek out the most ethically and environmentally responsible products. Climate change is particularly important issue to these people).

**B: Those *interested and concerned***, but often uncertain how to shop to achieve their ethical objectives.

**C: Aware of the problem**, not certain that their actions can have much effect or that they need to shop differently.

**D: Struggling**, do not give high priority to issues covered in Plan A

These examples of segmentation of ethical consumers in the UK are similar to marketing practices in the USA. An important demographic profile classified by organisations such as the National Marketing Institute in the USA is so-called LOHAS – Lifestyles of Health and Sustainability.<sup>67</sup> LOHAS is a market segment that is defined in terms of commitment to a range of sustainable or green issues, including health and fitness, environment, sustainable living, personal development, and social justice. The NMI identifies five LOHAS segments (Figure 3). There are a number of features of this type of segmentation worth highlighting. First, LOHAS segmentation is typical in dividing populations up into 'leaders' and 'followers', indicating which groups should be targeted for innovative products or services and which groups are key to mainstreaming new products and services. This is indicative of a larger issue in segmentation methods, which is the degree to which these methods depend on implicit or explicit theories of human motivation and of the dynamics of social change. Second, segmentations like this are just one part of broader strategic programmes to develop new products and new markets. Segmentation is, in short, one step in a broader process of strategic planning.

The typologies produced by the green consumer segmentation in the UK or by LOHAS segmentation in the USA are fairly typical of the ways in which segmentation systems are used to generate *useful* knowledge about differentiated populations. It should be emphasised that the content of these sorts of typologies is shaped by the imperatives of the organisational field in question: for example, those of advertising in the case of the green consumer segmentation; those of a particular company in the case of Marks and Spencer; and those of a large and diffuse marketing industry in the case of LOHAS segmentation. These segmentations are, then, inevitably 'partial' in the sense

that the pictures they generate of differentiated populations are guided by the pragmatic concerns which the segmentation in question is intended to inform.

**Figure 3: LOHAS segments (National Institute of Marketing, USA).<sup>68</sup>**

**LOHAS:** 19% (44 million) LOHAS consumers are dedicated to personal and planetary health. Not only do they make environmentally friendly purchases, they also take action – they buy green products, support advocacy programs and are active stewards of the environment.

**NATURALITES:** 14% (33 million) Focused on natural/organic consumer packaged goods with a strong health focus when it comes to foods/beverages. They are not politically committed to the environmental movement nor are they driven to eco-friendly *durable* goods.

**DRIFTERS:** 21% (49 million) This segment has good intentions, but when it comes to behavior, other factors influence their decision more than the environment. Somewhat price sensitive (and trendy), they are full of reasons *why* they do not make environmentally friendly choices.

**CONVENTIONALS:** 29% (67 million) This very practical segment does not have green *attitudes* but do have some “municipal” environmental behaviors such as recycling, energy conservation, and other more mainstream behaviors.

**UNCONCERNED:** 17% (40 million) The environment and society are *not* priorities to this segment. They are not concerned and show no environmentally-responsible behavior.

Segmentation is an important device in the private sector for generating knowledge about actual and potential markets for ethical products and services. These markets are increasingly important aspects of business strategy in both niche and mainstream marketing. There is a close relationship between the marketing research involved in producing the segmentation exercises reviewed above and academic research on sustainability and ethical consumption.<sup>69</sup> In particular, there is growing interest in the field of sustainable consumption research on the potential for applying social marketing solutions to various public issues defined in terms of ‘behaviour change’. In this field, the same sorts of typologies produced to identify potential markets for ethical products and services are used to identify segments of populations susceptible to different forms of ‘behaviour change’ interventions.

The idea that segmentation and social marketing is useful in developing effective behaviour change is increasingly accepted in sustainable development policy. For example, the Sustainable Development Commission’s (SDC) 2006 report *I will if you will* explicitly acknowledges this as a lesson learnt from public health policy and now to be applied to sustainability initiatives:

"Improving public health, from smoking to diet, all too often means changing people's behaviour. Across a number of countries, including the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the EU, 'social marketing' has been used to achieve this, for example by: being clear about what behaviour could be like and focusing on the right ways to achieve very specific improvements; focusing on the right people, by using 'segmentation' approaches which go beyond their immediate circumstances to capture what they think and feel about issues, what moves and motivates them; taking a long-term approach and using a mix of interventions and ways of reaching people; and using communication and information only in the context of an overall, coordinated marketing mix, rather than in isolation. The evidence is clear that social marketing of this kind can be a practical and effective approach for achieving behaviour change."<sup>70</sup>

It is evident in this example that the application of segmentation to new fields of public concern, as part of a broader application of social marketing techniques, depends on the reconceptualization of those fields into the abstract vocabulary of the challenges of 'behaviour change'. It is also notable in this case that the application of segmentation as part of social marketing strategies aimed at behaviour change requires an orientation towards certain sorts of variables – variables which capture what 'moves and motivates' people are the key issue if the concern is with *changing* what people do and think.

The Energy Savings Trust is the leading example of the use of segmentation in sustainable consumption. It's sophisticated segmentation model is used to advise local authorities on their public engagement around climate change issues, where 'public engagement' refers to developing strategies that target households and individuals with the aim of installing loft or cavity wall insulation or reducing car use. The Energy Savings Trust's segmentation divides people into three groups, according to their attitudes to the environment (see Figure 4).

#### Figure 4: *The Energy Savings Trust's segmentation model.*<sup>71</sup>

##### **Green Hearted**

Highly motivated minority – principal concern is environment. Often focused on single issues e.g. eat local, renewable energy. Often pre or post family. Most often well educated.

##### **Energy Savers**

The majority: Saving money and not wasting money of principal importance. 3 sub-groups: 1) Practical men >35 often with family. 2) >55s. The 'original conservationists'. Anti-waste values. 3) Women with a willing heart who want 'to do their bit' but worried & preoccupied heads.

##### **Apathetic**

Face too many barriers. Includes renting or living in flats. Mainly under 30. Some older too: 35+ and 55+ downmarket women, esp. Most often C2DE – some C1. Doing the least and extremely hard to reach.

The assumption behind this typology of local residents is that not all people respond to the same approaches and the same sorts of messages. In this case, the differentiation produced by the segmentation is shaped by the overall aim of communicating effectively with all types of residents – the differentiation is meant



to inform inclusive communications strategies. But it is also notable that the purpose of the segmentation here is oriented to getting people to adjust their behaviour in relation to pre-established goals and objectives (reducing environmental impacts of everyday consumption practices), not to eliciting people's opinions or perspectives in problem- definition *per se*.

We use the example of sustainable development initiatives to illustrate that the representations generated by segmentation methods are not in this case straightforwardly 'objective', in so far as they are shaped by the pragmatic imperatives that follow from defining sustainability issues in terms of behaviour change. This is important to emphasise both in terms of the effectiveness of different segmentation methods, and also because it returns to the ethical and reputational issues generated by the application of segmentation methods to public issues. Within the field of sustainability policy, segmentation methods are differently placed depending on the degree to which the overall aim of initiatives is focussed on behaviour change or deliberative engagement. This point is explicitly addressed in a 2007 report by the Institute of Public Policy Research for the *Sustainable Development Commission* on public engagement with climate change issues.<sup>72</sup> The IPPR makes a clear distinction between initiatives aimed at 'influencing attitudes and behaviour' and those which are aimed at 'opening up political space' for government policy. The report acknowledges the importance of segmentation for developing effective deliberative strategies aimed not just at changing people's behaviour but giving them a voice in the development of policies and initiatives:

"there are clear divisions in public opinion about climate change, as well as in the media, business and civil society groups. Engagement for political space (ranging from debates in the media through to the full range of consultative and deliberative techniques) needs to be targeted clearly at specific audiences – the strategies used for convincing sceptics are very different to those aimed at people in the middle ground. The first step is to analyse and segment audiences. It is crucial to separate out public groups into those that will be allies, those that are indifferent and those that are hostile, both to engaging in debate at all, and to particular solutions."<sup>73</sup>

The IPPR also acknowledges the importance of dynamic motivational variables, compared to more static socio-economic variables. However, the report reiterates that segmentation methods function differently depending on the overall strategic purpose for which these methods are deployed. Recommending the sophisticated segmentations developed by the Energy Savings Trust as a model from which lessons can be learnt, the IPPR nonetheless add an important caveat:

"However it should be borne in mind that these campaigns are aimed primarily at behaviour change, rather than engagement for debate over national strategy, and segmentation for the two purposes may not be the same."<sup>74</sup>

In this section, we have reviewed the use of segmentation methods in green, ethical and sustainable consumption. Segmentation is used both in the commercial sector, to target ethical consumers and grow markets. It is also used by a variety of government and non-government agencies to develop effective communications strategies around various sustainability campaigns. In the former case, segmentation is used in a conventional commercial marketing fashion as part of strategies oriented to achieving various public or social goals. In the latter case, segmentation is more directly oriented to goals of engaging differentiated publics with the aim of changing attitudes and behaviours. In terms of public

engagement, both of these approaches focuses primarily on processes of *informing* people, with the objective of changing people's behaviour in terms of purchasing decisions or shifting them to adopt new practices.

A key issue to emerge from this field, we have seen, is the different role that segmentation plays in strategies aimed at changing behaviour in relation to pre-established objectives and strategies which aim to engage people in the definition of issues and problems as well. We will return to this relationship more fully in Section 5 of this Research Synthesis.

## ii. Using market segmentation to deliver 'public value'

Segmentation methods are increasingly used in the management of public sector service delivery. Private sector consultancies are important actors in this process, providing segmentation and other marketing techniques for use in the public sector. This field is relevant to higher education contexts, given the challenges of applying marketing techniques in organisations charged with delivering '**public value**'. The imperatives driving the adoption of segmentation methods in the public sector include shrinking budgets, increased demand, increasing expectations, and personalisation agendas. In turn, distinctive understandings of public engagement are associated with segmentation in the public sector, including a concern with eliciting the views and perspectives of citizens in policy and programme design, and ensuring efficient targeting of resources. The public sector is therefore one field in which the three imperatives identified in Section 2.i). above – of accountability, efficiency, and legitimacy – are re-shaping understandings of public engagement, and provoking innovative responses.

The use of marketing in the public sector is not a new phenomenon, and has been a feature of so-called 'new public management for at least two decades.<sup>75</sup> There are long-standing concerns that the use of marketing techniques contributes to an individualist emphasis in public sector management. It is also argued that marketing strategies are not value free, in so far as they enact norms of market exchange and consumer rationality.<sup>76</sup> An important distinction in academic literature on this topic is between consumer marketing and strategic marketing. Segmentation methods might be used on both of these practices, but they represent different contexts of application.

The use of private sector models in the public sector has generated an extensive academic literature. Amongst the most influential strands of research is the idea of 'public value', developed by Harvard Professor, Mark Moore.<sup>77</sup> The concept of public value is meant to serve as an alternative to customer-oriented models of government, which presume that public agencies can simply be re-modelled on the ideal of markets. It is a concept that presents management activities as crucial in negotiating the purposes of public sector activities, or their 'public value'. There are two aspects to the creation of public value: client satisfaction, and social outcomes. The public value model is premised on the idea that there is no equivalent in the public sector of the one-to-one relationship with the customer, or of the intrinsic responsibility to create value for shareholders.

While these organisational features have been interpreted by some strands of social science to justify the introduction of market-models that simulate private sector incentive regimes, Moore's concept of 'public value' places the emphasis on the role of effective management in generating and maintaining conversations with the multiple stakeholders in any public body over how to deliver services. It



is a concept of relevance here because it places the emphasis on how public agencies maintain relations of accountability with the collectives, the plural publics, they are meant to serve, rather than substituting this relationship for multiple relationships with individual clients.

Academic debates about the role of market mechanisms in the public sector, the new public management, and public value are relevant to understanding the proliferation of segmentation methods in the public sector because they indicate the very different strategic uses to which such methods might be applied. Segmentation methods might be deployed as part of initiatives to better engage with plural grouping as constituents of a collective public, and they might be deployed to enhance strategies to better tailor service delivery to the needs of individual clients. These two uses are not mutually exclusive, and both serve identifiably public purposes of efficiency and accountability. Nevertheless, we draw the distinction to assist in the task of understanding the dynamics and implications of the diverse translations of segmentations into different fields of the public sector.

Questions of how to define the public purposes of public sector organisations are of course even more acutely felt in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2008, which in the UK have triggered shrinking budgets across the public sector.<sup>78</sup> The relationship between resource scarcity and increasing demand and heightened expectations is, however, a longer-standing dynamic of public sector transformations in the UK. In 2004, Accenture, one of the leading private sector consultancy firms involved in re-configuring public sector management in the UK, summarised the dynamics of public sector reform in the following terms:

"Today, public-sector organizations everywhere find themselves squeezed between their constituents' rising expectations and their own financial constraints. Citizens' needs are ever increasing. Yet continuing fiscal pressures limit government's ability to manoeuvre."<sup>79</sup>

It is this relationship that drives the increasing use of segmentation methods in the public sector, based on the assumption that segmenting 'the public' into sub-groups is a means to offering tailored services that both target those 'most in need' while also answering to the individualizing imperatives of personalisation agendas in the public sector. Public sector management has been reconfigured towards being responsive to the 'needs, expectations and perceptions' of different constituencies, understood in terms of hybrid figures such as the citizen-consumer or citizen-client.<sup>80</sup>

It is in this context that segmentation methods have become increasingly common features of public sector management strategies. Segmentation is just one part of a more widespread use of data technologies to improve efficiency of service delivery in the public sector. For example, the use of advanced geodemographic and spatial data analysis systems is advocated as a means of enabling public sector agencies to move beyond models of passive, undifferentiated publics as the recipients of services such as education, health, or policing.<sup>81</sup>

Segmentation methods have become central to the strategic imagination of public sector reform in the UK. In 2007, two of the leading private sector 'public service' consultancies specialising in advanced data analysis techniques, TNS-BMRB and the Futures Company, set up the Institute for Insight in the Public Service (IIPS). The IIPS is envisaged as "a collaborative thought leadership vehicle" dedicated to "bringing insights about the needs and expectations of British citizens to the heart of government. We exist to provide the context for service transformation, as well

as to bring citizen insight from around the world to bear.”<sup>82</sup> Research by these companies, leaders in public segmentation systems, is instrumental to the mission of understanding ‘What the Citizen Wants’. Segmentation is understood in this field as a method to “to prioritise customer insight and improve service delivery”<sup>83</sup>. It is just one of several techniques the IIPS uses to “uncover insight to drive service transformation”:

“Segmentations are particularly valuable to the public sector as they improve understanding of customer needs, attitudes and behaviours with the aim of supporting more strategic thinking and policy making, better designed services and tailored communications.”<sup>84</sup>

The increasing use of CRM approaches and other marketing techniques in the public sector, of which segmentation methods are a basic element, is only likely to increase in a context of budget cuts, increasing imperatives for transparency and accountability, and heightened demand for and expectations of services. The academic literature on the use of segmentation and other marketing techniques in the public sector indicates that there are two key problems to be addressed in any assessment of the potential of segmentation in public engagement.

1. Segmentation is clearly relevant to sectors in which imperatives of targeting and personalisation are acutely felt. However, a defining feature of the ‘public’ purposes of organisations in both the public sector and the third sector are certain sorts of ‘universal’ obligations: to provide a uniform level of service to all clients, for example; or obligations to be open and accessible to all. The use of segmentation methods involves a difficult negotiation of the different public purposes of organisations, balancing equally compelling imperatives of being responsive to *differentiated* publics without undermining obligations of *collective* stakeholding or *universal* access.
2. Segmentation methods are sourced from private sector marketing, and embody and enact certain normative assumptions of market-based practices. A key question to arise from our analysis so far is whether or not *segmenting markets* is the same as *segmenting publics*. Beyond obvious features of segmentation such as an emphasis on competitive strategy and individualisation, which may or may not be compatible with public values in different organisational contexts, two features of marketing techniques like segmentation are worth noting in this regard: first, they are based on a model of social relations as a series of *transactions* between principals and agents; and second, marketing techniques like segmentation are understood to be part of strategies of *communication*. A fundamental question for assessing the potential of segmentation in public engagement activities is, then, what forms of transactions and what forms of communication any given usage of segmentation encourages and sustains.

## Section 4 summary

- Segmentation is used in the commercial sector, to target ethical consumers and grow markets for sustainable products.
- Segmentation is used by a variety of government and non-government agencies to develop effective communications strategies around various sustainability campaigns.
- In terms of public engagement, both of these fields focus on processes of *informing* people, with the objective of changing people's behaviour in terms of purchasing decisions or shifting them to adopt new practices.
- There is a tension in using segmentation methods to divide publics up into distinct groups in the name of delivering 'public value', which is meant to be inclusive, collectively shared, or universal.
- There is a tension in using segmenting to determine what publics 'want' and organisational responsibilities to provide services that meet individual, community, and public 'needs';
- There is a tension between using segmentation methods as part of behaviour change initiatives and using segmentation methods as part of more deliberative strategies of engagement.
- Segmentation methods can be used in strategies aimed at changing behaviour in relation to pre-established objectives, and in strategies which aim to engage people in the definition of issues and problems as well.
- There is little existing research examining the conceptual, methodological, and practical similarities and differences between segmenting markets and segmenting publics

## 5. Segmentation in public engagement practice

This section reviews the variety of practical fields of public engagement in which segmentation methods are currently being applied. As already indicated, there is relatively little academic research explicitly focussed on understanding the proliferation of segmentation methods in public engagement contexts. Academic research in particular fields informs the definition of variables used in segmentation exercises, and is used to evaluate the success of segmentation exercises in helping to meet public engagement objectives.

As we have already indicated in this Research Synthesis, segmentation methods are used as part of broader strategies. The strategic rationales shaping the projects of which any specific segmentation exercise is a part will therefore shape the uses and contents of that segmentation. In this section, we identify four broad strategic rationales for which segmentation methods are used in public engagement activities:

1. **social marketing and behaviour change initiatives**, which aim to generate aggregate changes in patterns of consumption, engagement, and use
2. **visitor and audience engagement strategies** which seek to enhance and extend the experience and identifications of people with particular cultural services

In both of these cases, segmentation is used to develop better understandings of what members of the public do, think, value about different activities.

3. **campaigning**. In this case, segmentations are used not just to target people to change behaviour or adopt new practices, but to identify likely supporters and design strategies of mobilisation, lobbying, and participation.
4. the strategic **planning of communications** by organisations. In this case, segmentations are used to inform the design of 'internal' organisational programmes to improve engagement with members of the public.

These four purposes are 'ideal-types', and they are not mutually exclusive. Particular examples of public engagement practice will likely use segmentation methods for more than one of these purposes at the same time. In particular, the role of segmentation in shaping the strategic planning of communications is a common feature of the use of segmentations in different areas. Different fields of public engagement practice, are, however characterised by an emphasis on one or two of these purposes more than others.

In terms of the **three purposes of public engagement** identified by the NCCPE<sup>85</sup> – *informing*, *consulting*, and *collaborating* – these strategic rationales tend to emphasise some of these purposes more than others. Behaviour change initiatives focus primarily on models of public engagement in terms of *informing* and educating people; in the cases of visitor and audience engagement and planning of communications, there is more emphasis on *consulting* people as well

as informing people, since the aim in these cases is to embed a more responsive style of engagement into organisations' activities; while campaigning activities tend to include a strong emphasis on *collaborating* in addition to informing and consulting, since here the aim is to build relationships with particular constituencies of people in order to build sustained programmes of shared engagement and problem-solving.

This section reviews the three main areas of public engagement practice in which segmentation methods have increasingly been used. It elaborates in more detail how the tensions and issues identified in previous sections are practically negotiated in different organisational fields. These three areas are:

1. the use of segmentation in social marketing programmes across the public sector, where public engagement is primarily understood in terms of *informing* to produce changes in behaviour;
2. the use of segmentation in arts, culture and heritage sectors, where public engagement usually combines *informing* and *consulting* to enhance visitor or audience engagement; and
3. the use of segmentation in campaigning, where public engagement often also includes an emphasis on *collaborating* in order to generate and sustain mobilisation and support.

Although there are overlaps between these three areas, they represent three distinctive 'models' of the relations between segmentation methods, organisational strategy, and the subjects of segmentations that emerge from a review of segmentation in public engagement. None of the examples is drawn directly from Higher Education, an area where research on the possible uses of segmentation methods is underdeveloped. However, by identifying the strategic rationalities and purposes of public engagement that segmentation methods have been used to support, these models provide **analogies** for the different strategic purposes driving current debates and public engagement and higher education from which further questions and research problems can be generated.

## i. Segmentation and social marketing

The application of segmentation tools is an important aspect of the growing use of social marketing in various fields of public engagement by government departments and agencies. Within this broad field, there are different models of engagement within which segmentation methods are embedded. This section reviews the use of segmentation methods in public health initiatives by the Department of Health; segmentation methods used by DEFRA and the Department of Transport in relation to assessing public attitudes to environmental issues such as climate change; and the use of segmentation methods in initiatives by DfID to engage publics in global humanitarian and overseas aid issues. The different understandings of the subjects of public engagement and different models of the communication strategy used in public engagement across these policy areas illustrates different combinations of 'behaviour change' and 'deliberative engagement' within public engagement programmes. As already indicated, the emphasis tends to be on one-way models of *informing* people in this field of public engagement. It is also notable that across all these policy fields, the methodological and analytical emphases of segmentation practices are increasingly oriented towards the operationalisation of dynamic, motivational variables to generate segments.

The use of segmentation for public engagement in the public sector is intimately related to the growth of social marketing activities. Social marketing is a term developed to indicate that marketing practices are not only relevant to commercial activities in the private sector. The marketing theorist Philip Kotler, one of the originators of the concept, provides the following definition:

"Social marketing is the application of marketing concepts and tools to influence the behaviour change of a target audience in ways that create net benefits for the individual, community, and society at large. Typically, social marketing centres on such problem areas as health, environmental protection, better education, family planning and others."<sup>86</sup>

The principles of social marketing have become an influential medium for the application of marketing practices in the public sector and non-profit organisations, as one aspect of the growth of strategic marketing practices.<sup>87</sup> Figure 5 provides an overview of how market segmentation is positioned within social marketing principles.

### Figure 5: *Market Segmentation in Social Marketing.*<sup>88</sup>

Market segmentation and targeting is at the core of marketing strategy and consumers (or potential consumers) are the key stakeholder group for both commercial and social marketers:

#### **Market segmentation → Market targeting → Marketing positioning**

Market **segmentation** is the process of dividing the market in to groups of consumers who respond in a similar way to a given set of marketing stimuli (e.g. price, product features) or, alternatively, groups of consumers/customers with homogeneous needs or preferences. This may be on the basis of demographics, e.g. age, gender; geographics, e.g. by country, rural/urban areas; psychographics, e.g. lifestyle; or behavioural factors, e.g. brand loyalty.

Subsequently the organisation will select a **target** market based on a number of factors. For example, will the target market provide the required level of behaviour change (or meet other objectives)? Will it be accessible to the organisation taking into account the available resources, etc.?

The third stage is to **position** the product/organisation (a) against competitors and (b) in the minds of the consumer, i.e. arranging for a product/service to occupy a clear, distinctive and desirable place in the market and in the minds of target customers. This is achieved through product design, pricing, promotional activities, etc. Communication and branding are essential elements of a marketing programme.

Social marketing applies to various 'public issues' models of how consumer behaviour can be influenced which have been developed in commercial marketing.<sup>89</sup> In the process, social issues are reconfigured as objects of policy intervention by being presented as the aggregate outcome of myriad individual actions. For example, the use of social marketing principles in public health initiatives is shaped by an emphasis on personal responsibility for health and understanding the "the reasons why people choose to adopt unhealthy behaviours".<sup>90</sup>

A fundamental principle of social marketing programmes is that behaviour change takes place through voluntary action, but that this can be steered or 'nudged' with the help of marketing practices. The most developed uses of segmentation in social marketing is in areas where the social good is related to a public health issue; for example, reducing levels of smoking; reducing alcohol consumption; tackling increasing levels of obesity; encouraging exercise and fitness; encouraging organ donation; encouraging the wearing of seat belts.<sup>91</sup> In all of these fields, the purpose of public engagement is tightly contained within a field in which communication is aimed at generating an observable change in behaviour.

Segmentation is a basic feature of social marketing, where it is used to identify target groups for behaviour change initiatives.<sup>92</sup> It enables social marketers to focus on relatively homogenous groups, and develop a deeper understanding of these groups in order to develop an effective mix of targeting strategies.<sup>93</sup>

There are a number of private consultancies and academic research groups who provide expertise in social marketing, with the aim of helping organisations to develop 'behaviour change interventions'. In 2006, the UK government established the National Social Marketing Centre as 'the centre of excellence for social marketing and behaviour change in the UK'.<sup>94</sup> Through this consolidation of a network of 'knowledge brokers' providing technical expertise to public sector organisations, segmentation methods have become an increasingly widespread feature of government communications strategies of public engagement around a number of issues.<sup>95</sup> While widespread, segmentation methods are used in different ways in different policy fields however, depending on the model of public engagement within which they are deployed.

The NSMC acknowledges that different segmentation criteria generate different forms of knowledge, and that these different forms of knowledge in turn inform different types of intervention. Some segmentations identify who and where people are; some focus on what people do, in terms of behaviours, service use, consumption patterns, and so on; and some focus on what people think and feel, in terms of needs, motivations, values and influences.<sup>96</sup> Interventions can range from informing and encouraging, to servicing, designing environments, to controlling and regulating.<sup>97</sup> The combination of these forms of knowledge and types of intervention shapes the different models of public engagement that segmentation methods can be used to support.

An important feature of the growth of social marketing is its dependence on a particular aspect of marketing theory, in which marketing is understood as a *communication process* based on *exchange*: "Marketing is human activity directed at satisfying needs and wants through exchange processes"<sup>98</sup> This understanding generates two issues for social marketing strategies:

1. First, what is being exchanged? Is it a product, a service, or an idea: "a key issue for social marketers is to define the nature of their product, i.e., exactly what are people buying when they adopt new behaviours such as recycling or stopping smoking?"<sup>99</sup>
2. Second, how is exchange conceptualised in social marketing? As we shall see, some uses of social marketing adopt relatively restricted models of exchange in terms of individualised transfers of information, while other uses inform much more expansively dialogic models of communication.



Having introduced the basic outlines of the place of segmentation methods in social marketing practices aimed at aggregate behaviour change outcomes, we will review in turn the role of segmentation in public health, in environmental sustainability, and in development communications. There are important differences of emphasis in the aims and objectives of public engagement in these three areas, and this is reflected in the uses to which segmentation methods are put in each case.

## Segmentation in public health

Public health is the area where the use of social marketing and market segmentation in public engagement is most developed.<sup>100</sup> One of the most well established fields in which these practices are deployed is in Development Policy, where segmentation methods are basic elements of public health initiatives around reproductive health, not least in HIV and AIDS programmes and programmes designed to increase condom use and change sexual behaviour. In this policy field, segmentation methods are part of broader strategies of participatory civic engagement<sup>101</sup> - they involve both informing and consulting. Using market segmentation techniques fits with an emphasis on targeting distinctive groups of behaviour types: segments in public health contexts in developing countries are based on how people behave or how they respond to communications efforts.

While well established in Development Policy fields, segmentation as a tool of social marketing is increasingly important in the planning and management of public health initiatives in Western contexts. One feature of this growth is the tailoring of segmentation methods to the distinctively *public* qualities of public health initiatives. It is not assumed that segmentation can or should be adopted unchanged from commercial marketing: "What marketing sciences do well is to identify, tap, and amplify underlying values and systems that motivate potential consumers".<sup>102</sup> In this field, it is necessary to develop understandings of the subjects of public health initiatives which are consistent with the strategic purposes and values of community-based engagement. An important dimension of this translation of segmentation into public health is the development of segmentation models that go beyond a traditional focus on demographic and epidemiological variables, to develop clusters of 'health lifestyles'.<sup>103</sup> Thus, the adoption of social marketing in public health is indicative of a broader move to develop deeper segmentations which capture what 'moves and motivates' people, using psycho-graphic data of various sorts.

Segmentation has become a basic feature of UK government public health initiatives using social marketing in the last decade.<sup>104</sup> The principle at work in this field is to use segmentation to differentiate segments of the public in order to better address their specific health concerns:

"The purpose of audience segmentation strategies in public health and health behaviour research is to identify easily defined, mutually exclusive population subgroups whose members share characteristics that are important barriers to or facilitators of the health-related behaviour of interest. Each population subgroup should also be reachable through similar outreach and intervention strategies."<sup>105</sup>

In 2006, the Department of Health (DH) undertook a major segmentation exercise of the population of England, *Healthy Foundations*, to inform policy around six public health priority areas: smoking, obesity, alcohol, sexual health, mental health, substance abuse.<sup>106</sup> This exercise reflects a concern with using segmentation to enhance the responsiveness of public service delivery to the



differentiations of target populations; it also sought to provide a coherent strategy to the application of segmentation across different areas of public health:

"The model is intended as a building block for a customer-focused approach to the development of health behaviour change interventions. It should *not* be viewed solely as a segmentation for informing communications. The use of segmentation is not new to DH. However, at present there is no single consistent approach to segmentation across different public health target areas. One of the objectives of this project was to develop a segmentation framework or model that can be applied across issues, thereby giving a '360 degree' picture of the population rather than a series of overlapping views of people from the perspective of each issue."<sup>107</sup>

The *Healthy Foundations* segmentation model combined three types of data-sets to produce its model of target audiences: epidemiology; social and consumer research; and public health targets. It uses three 'dimensions' to identify those segments of the whole population most likely to adopt so-called 'at risk behaviours': age and life-style; circumstances and environments; and attitudes and beliefs towards health and health issues.

The *Healthy Foundations* motivational segmentation is one example of a shift in thinking about public health communication strategies beyond a narrow focus on the provision of information, a shift evident in other fields such as environmental communication as well. This is indicative of a move towards thinking of public engagement as more than simply the response to a deficit of knowledge on the public's behalf. This shift in thinking about public engagement beyond the aim of providing more and more information is crystallised by The King's Fund's 2008 *Kicking Bad Habits* research programme. This report illustrates how segmentation methods are re-positioned around motivational variables as part of this shift. In seeking to rethink behaviour change interventions beyond a paradigm of informing people of the beneficial and detrimental health effects of certain behaviours, it focussed on five key questions:

1. To what extent do financial incentives help individuals change their behaviour?
2. What behaviour change interventions are most effective for individuals in low income groups?
3. How effective are information-led strategies?
4. To what extent does increasing an individual's motivation and self-confidence help them change their behaviour?
5. How can behaviour change interventions best be targeted and tailored to secure the desired health outcomes?<sup>108</sup>

The first four questions have significant implications for how the final question about the use of segmentation strategies in securing outcomes. These four questions imply a focus on dynamic, motivational variables in generating segments and clusters. And this is an increasingly important emphasis across the different fields in which segmentation methods are applied.

This focus on motivations is an important feature of the *Healthy Foundations* segmentation, which combines quantitative and qualitative methods to generate target groups:

The major benefit is that we believe *Healthy Foundations* will provide a tool to enhance accessibility to services. Specifically, *Healthy Foundations*

provides a unique motivation segmentation, enabling service providers and commissioners to re-align the front-end of services enhancing accessibility, service uptake and subsequent health outcomes. *Healthy Foundations* provides a patient led insight into the motivation and subsequent needs and requirements of the population. This population informed insight provides the NHS and Department of Health with the intelligence to improve public health delivery systems, considering the motivations and needs of the population to offer appropriate intensity and consequential format of intervention to empower individuals across the discrete subsections of the population ensuring a systematised and scaled response for better health outcomes for all. Utilising these insights will inform bottom up tailored commissioning of access to services, ensuring responsive services. This insight may also be utilised to inform differential interventions required to address long-term conditions, considering specifically the intensity and format of intervention required to achieve optimal supported self management.<sup>109</sup>

*Healthy Foundations* is, then, an example of segmentation being used to differentiate the public in response to both *efficiency* and *accountability* imperatives: it is meant to enable cost-effective and tailored policies that “address the needs of the population as expressed by the population.”

It is also worth underlining that the DH’s motivational segmentation is designed as part of a broad repertoire of management technologies made available to local authorities, Primary Care Trusts, and other locally focussed public health organisations. As in other sectors (e.g. the Arts Council’s segmentation of arts visitors discussed below), a segmentation as thorough and extensive as *Healthy Foundations* depends on centralised resource capacity, which is then scaled downwards to local actors. Two issues therefore arise from this example:

1. A segmentation of this sophistication requires a particular level of resource capacity to be produced in the first place.
2. And the effective local application of such segmentations also raises issues of capacity in terms of data analysis skills and capabilities amongst those expected to make use of such knowledge.

In respect of both of these issues, the *Kicking Bad Habits* programme acknowledged that “Targeting, geodemographics and social marketing all involve analysing a range of complex data”. These sorts of management practices are based on the expectation that public health organisations have the capacity to undertake ongoing assessments of local health needs and requirements. The King’s Fund’s sponsored programme established, however, that this issue of capacity and skill was a real concern:

“NHS staff may be required to analyse data but lack the skills necessary to interpret it accurately and use it to develop or adapt behaviour change interventions. *What seems to be happening right now in a lot of PCTs is that they are spending the time and energy to identify groups, but the next step of actually doing something with that information isn’t happening as much as it should.* (Seminar participant)”.<sup>110</sup>

This type of finding is quite consistent with the management studies research reviewed in Section 3 on the complexities of effectively putting segmentation methods into practice for their intended purposes. Thus, two things emerge clearly from research on segmentation and social marketing in public health initiatives:

1. Segmentation models in this field involve complex processes of data gathering and analysis;
2. Related to this, segmentation methods are just one part of broader strategies of generating policies, applying techniques, and designing effective interventions.

## Segmentation and environmentally sustainable behaviours

Segmentation methods are widely used in environmental policy fields to help design behaviour change interventions, initiatives on reducing car use, more responsible water usage, domestic energy management, recycling, and buying local food. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) has developed a sophisticated segmentation model to inform public engagement activities in support of 'pro-environmental behaviours'.<sup>111</sup> This segmentation exercise drew on existing models, and combined quantitative and qualitative methods to generate a model to understand people's behaviour and motivations.<sup>112</sup> The principle behind this exercise was that there was no single 'Joe Bloggs' position on environmental issues, and that segmentation methods are a means to better understand audiences and thereby design more effective policy.

The DEFRA segmentation model divides the public into seven clusters (See Figure 6). These seven segments each share a distinct set of attitudes and beliefs towards the environment, and are generated based on responses to attitudinal variables.<sup>113</sup>

### Figure 6: DEFRA's segmentation model for pro-environmental behaviour.<sup>114</sup>

- 1). Waste watchers 12%
- 2). Honestly disengaged 18%
- 3). Cautious participants 14%
- 4). Stalled starters 10%
- 5). Positive greens 18%
- 6). Concerned consumers 14%
- 7). Sidelines supporters 14%

As with other examples reviewed in this Research Synthesis, the DEFRA segmentation is oriented towards particular strategic objectives of this policy field. In this case, this is reflected in particular by a conceptual focus on identifying 'barriers to change'.<sup>115</sup> DEFRA segmentation interprets the seven segments around *willingness* and *ability* to change behaviour in pro-environmental directions.<sup>116</sup> This in part reflects a move beyond the assumption that pro-environmental behaviour correlates with knowledge of environmental issues that has underwritten previous information-led campaigns. This leads to the seven segments being clustered into two broad groups: 'low potential and unwilling' segments ('waste watchers', 'honestly disengaged', 'cautious

participants', and 'stalled starters'), and 'high ability and willing' segments (positive greens', 'concerned consumers', and 'sideline supporters'). The application of this interpretative frame on the segmentation model is used to inform a particular package of interventions, ones which focus on certain segments as being more significant than others in driving the shift to pro-environmental behaviours:

"It is apparent that segments 1, 2 and 3 have relatively high ability to act, though there are very different motivations and barriers particularly for segment 2 and this group are less willing to act to be more environmentally friendly at least. Segment 4 are more willing to act though currently relative beginners in terms of their behaviours. Segment 5's willingness to act is informed by their concerns about others' actions. Segment 6 and 7 are least willing to act. It is evident that each segment's willingness and ability to act, assessments of their potential to act and their beliefs, barriers and motivations have implications for the nature of the interventions that are likely to be most effective in encouraging higher levels of pro-environmental behaviour."<sup>117</sup>

The segmentation model is used as part of a differential strategy of public engagement, informed by models in which certain segments of the population are understood to be leaders or 'prime movers' in adopting new behaviours. The DEFRA segmentation model therefore informs a strategic reconceptualization of who can be motivated to live greener lifestyles, and how. It is used to assess which groups might be more willing and able to adopt certain behaviours, and which might be more reluctant or resistant. The emphasis on public engagement, in this case, remains however firmly on finding ways of better informing particular segments about specified practices they might adopt.

Research on public attitudes to environmental issues and climate change has also been undertaken in relation to transport policy by the Department of Transport (DoT). Segmentation methods are a key part of the strategic review of research on public attitudes to climate change and transport behaviour commissioned by the DoT in 2006. This research reviewed the use of market segmentation in transport and travel research, and the variety of segmentation models used. The main findings of this research are shown in Figure 7.

Two things are particularly noteworthy about the findings of this research review. First, segmentation and targeting are recommended primarily on efficiency grounds, in terms of both developing interventions which work and which also reduce costs. Second, there is an emphasis on the importance of developing segmentations which use psychographic variables to better enable understandings of *motivational* dynamics of behaviour change. For example, research on travel behaviours has used this approach to identify six segments of car users: Die Hard Drivers; Car Complacents; Car Aspirers; Malcontented Motorists; Car Sceptics; Aspiring Environmentalists; and Reluctant Riders.<sup>118</sup> Methodologically, this approach is based on the view that using socio-demographic variables to generate segments is too crude, and does not help identify the personal factors (such as moral norms, psychological attachment) which shape attitudes to, in this case, car use. The implication of this sort of approach is that interventions should seek to target the motivations and perceptions of different segments, rather than adopting 'one size fits all' approaches.<sup>119</sup>

Two features of the DoT 2006 review of evidence on segmentation methods in transport policy therefore stand out.

First, the report makes the case for the greater use of market segmentation methods to enhance understandings of the ways in which different people are motivated by different factors and are affected differently by interventions. The emphasis is placed upon motivational segmentation. Since 2006 this approach to using segmentation has been applied to other transport issues, for example to motorcycle safety campaigns, in which segmentation methods were used to differentiate motorcyclists into seven segments on the basis of their motivations for riding: Performance disciples; Performance hobbyists; Riding disciples; Riding hobbyists; Car rejecters; Car aspirants; and Look-at-me enthusiasts. These segments are identified as holding different attitudes to safety risks and of where responsibility for ensuring safety lies.<sup>120</sup>

**Figure 7: Segmentation and Public Attitudes to Climate Change and Transport.<sup>121</sup>**

- There is a general consensus that a staged and targeted strategy of travel behaviour change is likely to be more effective than a 'one size fits all' approach. However, research on how best to define target groups of travellers is in its infancy.
- Behaviourally-based interventions can be significantly more cost-effective than traditional service delivery, and targeting resources can enhance this efficiency. Segmentation allows a much richer assessment of resource requirements.
- Segmentation research starts from the premise that there is little point in addressing the *average* consumer, (or in this context, the average level of car dependence or attitudes to climate change). Instead, different people must be treated in different ways because they are motivated by different factors, experience different impediments to change and are affected in different ways by policy.
- The *same behaviour* can take place for different reasons and the *same attitudes* can lead to different behaviours.
- Segmentation allows easy wins to be targeted and will add value to existing programmes. The greatest potential for behaviour change is often at the margins, and this is invariably ignored in the design of transport policy.
- Travel behaviour research has almost exclusively applied *a priori* methods of segmentation based on age, income or some aspect of travel behaviour (high car user vs. low user). However, such segments are not necessarily homogenous in terms of *motivation* and attitudes are increasingly transcending demographic lines.
- The most informative and policy relevant segmentation studies use *post-hoc* research based on *psychographic* measurements to systematically analyse combinations of factors and define new categories of users. These are interpretable in terms of their attitudinal and aspirational profiles and their potential modal *switchability*.
- In the transport sector there have been very few attempts to define distinct mobility segments in a systematic and psychologically meaningful sense.
- Segmentation can be criticised for usually being cross-sectional and not modelling any process of social change. To address this, studies could be designed with the intention of developing an understanding over time of how the segments evolve in response to normative and contextual developments with respect to travel and climate change.

The second feature of the DoT review is the distinction it draws between the different sorts of public engagement which this sort of segmentation approach

can support: “segmentation is a cornerstone of any travel behaviour change programme, *regardless of whether that programme is attempting to change behaviour by changing attitudes first or not.*” (emphasis added).<sup>122</sup> The review contrasts those interventions which seek to directly influence behaviour by changing attitudes with attempts to change behaviour which do not purposely set out to change attitudes. This contrast cuts directly to a key question within this policy field, namely whether it matters that people have detailed understandings of the causes and consequences of, for example, climate change, in order to generate changed behaviours:

“With respect to influencing travel choices and closing this gap, the big question is: *does it actually matter whether people have a detailed knowledge of the causes and consequences of climate change?* It would appear that there are two opposing views on the importance of information in general with respect to its role in closing the attitude-behaviour gap:

(i) Those that believe that if only people are informed and knowledgeable, they will act in accordance with this new knowledge (termed the ‘deficit model’);

(ii) Those that believe that information is a necessary but not sufficient ingredient to encourage individual action. Advocates of this belief recognise the need to understand behaviour change from a number of different perspectives (anthropological, socio-psychological and economic) and at a number of different levels in society and strive for a more civic or deliberative ideal of public engagement. The evidence review suggests that this view is the emerging consensus.”<sup>123</sup>

There is an identifiable shift across environmental policy and sustainability fields away from ‘deficit models’ which assume that providing knowledge to people is a key to encouraging change, towards more rounded and inter-disciplinary approaches which engage at a number of different levels.<sup>124</sup> This latter approach is associated with the development of so-called ‘Community Based Social Marketing’ (CBSM).<sup>125</sup> CBSM adopts a more deliberative understanding of public engagement than other approaches to environmental behaviours. It is premised on evidence from social psychology and sociologies of practice which indicates that initiatives to change environmental behaviours work best when they involve direct engagement with people through collective forms of civic or community engagement. The same interdisciplinary approach is evident in the research of the SEGMENT programme, which investigates the use of market segmentation methods in encouraging the adoption of energy efficient forms of transport. This programme is premised on the assumption that certain ‘life change moments’, such as changing jobs, moving house, or becoming a parent, are the points at which established transport routines and travel habits can be most effectively targeted by marketing interventions to encourage behaviour change.<sup>126</sup>

DoT research on segmentation methods is therefore notable for two reasons. First, it clearly indicates the conceptual and methodological differences between different approaches to segmentation. In the emphasis on psychographic or motivational variables in segmentation models of public attitudes to climate change and travel choices, this field illustrates the degree to which segmentation is used in contemporary public policy to help identify the differential susceptibilities or inclinations to change behaviour.<sup>127</sup> In short, it clearly illustrates that segmentation methods are not value-neutral, and that adopting the appropriate segmentation method will be shaped by the overall strategic purpose for which they are intended. Second, transport research is noteworthy for making use of academic research on the importance of psychological factors, practices, and discourses in recommending the use of segmentation methods to



support more deliberative styles of public engagement than is often the case in other fields of environmental policy towards behaviour change. In this case, then, segmentation is recommended not only as a route to more effective targeting, but as part of a conceptual shift towards more contextually sensitive models of behaviour change. In this shift, segmentation is used to inform public engagement strategies which include deliberative or consultative activities.<sup>128</sup> There is, in short, no single model of public engagement for behaviour change in which segmentation methods are located.

## Segmentation in development communication

In contrast to the use of segmentation methods in public health or environmental sustainability fields, the use of segmentation by the Department for International Development (DfID) is not related to a form of public engagement with an easily observable 'output' in the form of changed behaviour. DfID has used segmentation to glean an understanding of public attitudes to development issues, as part of a communication-focussed model of public engagement. The objectives of public engagement in this case are to raise public awareness and increase public understanding of international development issues. DfID has conducted research monitoring public opinion on these issues since 1999. Since 2007, this research has been conducted by TNS, a leading private global market research company, having previously been conducted by the Office of National Statistics.

DfID's segmentation model, first developed in 2008, identifies six segments amongst the population of the UK. They are differentiated by their attitudes and values towards poverty in poor countries. The six attitudinal segments are: Active Enthusiasts, Interested Mainstream, Distracted Individuals, Family First Sympathisers, Insular Sceptics and Disapproving Rejecters:

"Levels of awareness, understanding, concern, and support for the issues experienced by people in poor countries differ markedly by segment. Levels are typically higher among those in the priority segments (Active Enthusiasts, Interested Mainstream and Family First Sympathisers), of which Active Enthusiasts demonstrate the most engagement."<sup>129</sup>

As with other examples of segmentation in the public sector we have reviewed in this section, this segmentation is used to inform a distinctive inflection to DfID's communications strategy. It informs the identification of 'priority segments', who are the three segments consisting of Active Enthusiasts, Interested Mainstream, and Family First Sympathisers. The DfID segmentation illustrates not just a differentiated approach to public communications, but a hierarchy of segments depending on levels of likely receptivity, support and engagement: "These results support a requirement for differentiated messages to engage the different groups." Furthermore, it is acknowledged that it is a challenge whether to seek to engage those in the 'Disapproving' segment at all.<sup>130</sup> The 2008 segmentation model is now used in an ongoing way to show changes over time in levels of support for development issues across the different segments; and to assess and design effective 'messaging' around development issues.<sup>131</sup>

The DfID segmentation is indicative of a use of this methodology which is directed in part by the *legitimacy* imperatives of this organisation. A major concern shaping the application of this segmentation to the monitoring of public opinion and the design of public communication strategies is the need to sustain and build support for UK government funding of overseas development programmes. This is a feature of public engagement in the field of development and global poverty issues more broadly. Three reasons for public engagement are identified: it gives "the government and NGOs legitimacy to promote development on the



world stage”; it “strengthens NGO fundraising”, enabling greater independence in service delivery from government funding; and “the public has an important role to play in responding to the challenge of poverty”.<sup>132</sup> DfID’s segmentation model is deployed for strategies of public engagement around issues in which engagement is typically ‘wide and thin’, and where it is recognised that any deepening of engagement is not likely to include everyone. This is also a context in which segmentation is used to support public engagement strategies that draw not only on research on behaviour change but also on models of deliberative engagement.<sup>133</sup> It is notable in this respect that the central objective addressed by the DfID segmentation – government spending on development aid to poor countries – is more contentious than the objectives in other fields, such as sustainability and pro-environmental behaviours.

Segmentation methods are used differently in relation to fields more amenable to ‘Nudge’-style behaviour change interventions, in which the aim is to steer people towards adopting practices in support of issues around which there is a broad positive consensus; compared to fields in which issues and objectives are either more complex or contentious, in which more emphasis on deliberation and consultation and other ‘technologies of elicitation’ might be appropriate.<sup>134</sup> The ‘content’ of the segmentations in these two versions is likely to be significantly different, given the specific disposition which is to be targeted – behaviour, attitudes, values, etc. In both cases, the aim of the segmentation methods is to generate relatively stable images of public attitudes and values, but as the increasing emphasis on ‘motivational’ factors indicates, these are produced with the aim of ‘generating movement’ – changing people’s attitudes, increasing public support, altering behaviour, and overcoming barriers and impediments.<sup>135</sup> Segmentation methods are not, then, merely ‘descriptive’ devices, they are normative in the sense that their design and application is always shaped by the broader purposes of public engagement strategies of which they are one aspect.

We have seen in this sub-section that the use of segmentation in social marketing is shaped primarily by the first of the four strategic rationales identified at the start of this section, that of changing behaviour. This is reflected in an emphasis on public engagement as a means of informing people of different practices and choices available to them. While other rationales and purposes of public engagement are evident in this field, they are much more visible in other fields of public engagement activity, which we now address in 4.ii). and 4.iii). But one important finding of this review of segmentation in social marketing is also observable in these other sectors – the increasing emphasis on developing segmentations that use so-called psycho-graphic variables to capture the dynamism of what ‘moves and motivates’ people to change existing behaviours and adopt new ones, identify with particular causes, or commit time and energy to particular causes.

## **ii. Segmentation in arts, culture, and heritage sectors**

Segmentation methods are used extensively in the arts, culture, and heritage sectors, including Museums, Libraries, and Broadcasting. There is also a well established field of academic research on audience and visitor studies that is closely integrated into the management of cultural organisations.<sup>136</sup> Public engagement in this field seeks to address various public subjects, such as ‘patrons’, ‘visitors’, and ‘viewers’. This field is also one where the tensions between using segmentation methods to enhance the performance of institutions with formal commitments to open and universal access is an important issue.

There is a long-standing interest in cultural policy in using segmentation methods to establish marketing strategies for cultural institutions.<sup>137</sup> The use of geo-demographic profiling tools such as ACORN or Mosaic is widespread in arts and cultural marketing.<sup>138</sup> More recently, the proliferation of market segmentation in the arts, culture, and heritage sectors has been encouraged by the influence of CRM practices, reflected in a shift from using simple demographic variables to focus on cultivating sustainable customer relationships with cultural audiences. In this field, segmentation has become a basic feature of strategies which seek to increase visitor numbers, increase the use of existing cultural infrastructures such as libraries and museums, and grow audiences. It has also become an important asset in developing more inclusive audience strategies which are responsive to the needs and interests of culturally diverse audiences.

## Segmentation and public accountability

The BBC engages in a wide range of audience research, including research commissioned from private sector market research companies.<sup>139</sup> Much of this research seeks to establish the degree to which the organisation is succeeding in delivering on the multiple imperatives that face it, of delivering 'public value' and being responsive to diverse audience tastes and need. This includes the use of segmentation methods to engage audiences with programming, but also the use of segmentation in broader strategies to engage people with BBC-led campaigns around, for example, environmental issues and climate change.

One feature of quantitative research informing the refinement of the BBC's 'public purpose remit' was the identification of certain groups who were relatively disengaged from the BBC.<sup>140</sup> The findings of the public purpose remit<sup>141</sup> consultation exercise in 2007 were in turn used to inform the BBC Trust's Audience Engagement Consultation, also undertaken in 2007.<sup>142</sup> This wide ranging consultative process was used to develop detailed understandings of how people engaged with the BBC, and audience segmentation methods were used to establish the different relationships that different groups of people felt they had with the BBC and its services. The BBC's ongoing research on the delivery of this public purpose remit continues to use quantitative methodologies to assess the degree to which different audience segments approve of the organisations' performance.<sup>143</sup> Research initiated in 2009 and published in 2010 as part of a Strategy Review was based on a distinctive model of audience segmentation: qualitative research was based on 'lifestyle peer groups' established using demographic and socio-economic variables.<sup>144</sup>

The BBC's audience research uses demographic and socio-economic data to help keep track of the delivery of its remit to socially, geographically, and culturally diverse audiences. It is one example of a cultural organisation responding to the imperative of delivering universal principles of public value in the context of an increasing awareness of diverse audience tastes and interests. This is a defining feature of the growing use of segmentation methods in the arts, culture, and heritage sectors. Public engagement in this field is shaped by the concern with developing culturally *diverse* audience. Segmentation is understood as a means to enable organisations to be more inclusive by better understanding this diversity.<sup>145</sup> And a key issue emerging in research in this field is whether demographic variables, such as socio-economic status, ethnicity, age or gender, are necessarily the best means of developing effective segmentations.<sup>146</sup>

## Segmentation and the strategic planning of communications

The importance of the definition of the variables used in segmentation exercises is illustrated by the Arts Council's recent initiatives on cultural diversity and audience development. Its 2006 guide for arts marketers identifies segmentation as a key resource, but one not without its difficulties.<sup>147</sup> Not least of these is an acknowledgement that segmentation methods run the risk of giving the impression of classifying people into arbitrary categories 'behind their backs'. It also identified the same shift towards using psychographic variables that has been evident in other fields where segmentation methods are increasingly used:

"There are many ways to divide up a potential market. It used to be a case of chopping up audiences along the lines of geography, age, income and education. These are still of great use but finding commonality is not so simple anymore, partly due to the many choices now available to us all. Once you get past basic geographic or demographic distinctions, the psychographic stuff is where it gets really interesting. Here, looking at motivations, aspirations and actual behaviour of audiences can be fascinating."<sup>148</sup>

This observation is based on the claim not only that audiences more diverse nowadays, but that identities are much less fixed than they once were. This conceptual and methodological shift is indicative of a more explicit recognition in arts marketing of the distinction between *profiling*, which refers to the description of an audience, and *segmentation*, which involves categorisation undertaken with the aim of taking action that has results and consequences.<sup>149</sup> As in other sectors concerned with effective public engagement, amongst professional arts marketing organisations such as the Arts Marketing Association<sup>150</sup>, the use of CRM segmentation methods and psychographics has become increasingly prevalent.

In 2009, the Arts Council launched an extensive audience segmentation, a resource available to local arts and culture organisations to help them better plan and manage the delivery of their services.<sup>151</sup> This segmentation is based on a distinctive approach which does not start with pre-existing socio-demographic segments, but adopts an 'arts-based' approach that is based on the assumption that different segments are characterised by distinct patterns of engagement, attitudes and motivations towards the arts. It is explicitly tailored for use in arts marketing, and seeks to understand socio-demographic and lifestyle factors from the perspective of engagement in the arts, not the other way around.

This conceptual and methodological focus on the motivations for engaging with the arts and culture is a distinctive feature of the use of segmentation in arts marketing, which increasingly eschews simple demographic profiling or categorical definitions of 'the arts' to focus instead on identifying 'interest strands' characterised by similar values, attitudes and concerns.<sup>152</sup> The Arts Council's arts-based segmentation divides the population into thirteen segments. These thirteen segments are in turn aligned into three groupings according to their 'propensity to engage' (Figure 8). This is combined with geographical data-analysis to provide local level segmentations to different regions and areas of England. As with the case of the DH's Healthy Foundations segmentation, The Arts Council segmentation is designed as a resource to be used by local arts managers.

## Figure 8: The Arts Council's (2009) arts-based segmentation and 'propensity to engage'

*Highly Engaged* (urban arts eclectics; traditional culture vultures)

*Some Engagement* (fun, fashion and friends; mature explorers; dinner and a show; family and community focused; mid-life hobbyists; bedroom DJs; retired arts and crafts)

*Not Currently Engaged* (time poor dreamers; a quiet pint with the match; older and home-bound; limited means, nothing fancy)

The BBC and the Arts Council are two examples of leading national-level organisations using quantitative methodologies to develop audience segmentations to support public engagement activities. They are part of a broader field of research, which also includes government departments such as the Department of Culture, Media and Sport, into public engagement with cultural practices, which tends to focus on four questions:

1. What kind of people visit, attend and participate in culture and who is missing?
2. What types of activity do they engage with and what is the crossover between them?
3. What motivates people to engage, and what prevents them?
4. How do people actually experience a particular cultural activity?<sup>153</sup>

In relation to all four of these questions, research increasingly focussed on the motivations and barriers to attendance in cultural activities.<sup>154</sup> Segmentation methods are used in this field of policy and public engagement for three purposes:

1. To market effectively to existing markets – to get people to come back, to re-attend or re-visit;
2. To design engagement activities that would be effective with different audience segments;
3. And to look for new audiences.

This is the dual emphasis on *finding* and *growing* audiences characteristic of the use of segmentation methods in contemporary arts marketing.<sup>155</sup>

## Segmentation and visitor and audience engagement

Research in arts and culture marketing overlaps with academic audience research in visitor studies, education, and cultural and media studies. The changing methodologies used to generate audience segmentations in these sectors is part of a broader process of reconceptualising audiences as dynamic, fluid, and diverse.<sup>156</sup> For example, segmentation methods are widely used in the museum sector to better understand how to engage visitors, combining the informing and consulting dimensions of public engagement. For example, the British Museum segments its audiences according to their motivations for visiting the museum or a particular exhibition, identifying four types of motivation: social, intellectual, emotional and spiritual.<sup>157</sup>

There are three issues which arise from the use of segmentation in arts, culture and heritage sectors.

First, segmentation methods are deployed in this field in response to a widely shared commitment to the value of inclusion. The aim of using segmentation is to inform broader and more sensitive public engagement strategies which are sensitive to cultural diversity and engage with socially excluded or under-served segments.<sup>158</sup> For example, one of the high profile audience segmentation exercises in this sector has been undertaken by the National Trust. The initial impulse for this exercise was a response to the recognition that its audience was increasingly skewed towards particular, relatively elderly segments of the population. Since 2006, the National Trust has developed and implemented a sophisticated customer segmentation in partnership with private sector market research consultants.<sup>159</sup> The application of this segmentation involves a negotiation of the National Trust's universal public remit to provide a service for the whole population with recognition of different levels of engagement.<sup>160</sup> This is one example of the use of segmentation to inform the strategic planning of communications by an organisation in order to better engage with the public.

Second, there is an identifiable conceptual and methodological shift in this sector towards the use of segmentation systems which focus on attitudes, motivations and values, rather than simple profiles based on socio-demographic variables. This is reflected in the proliferation of segmentations which focus on the *identities* that characterise different segments. For example, the National Trust's segmentation is based on seven 'days out segments', defined by motivation and mindset: inner-directed; live life to the full; explorer family; out and about; young experience seekers; curious minds; kids first family; home and family.<sup>161</sup> As with other examples, these segments are not simply differentiated, but are aligned on a continuum according to the degree of propensity to engage with the National Trust's services – from the highly knowledgeable 'inner directed' and 'live life to the full' segments who are looking for challenging and stimulating days out; to the more risk adverse, mainstream 'home and family' and 'kids first family' segments at the other end of the scale. This field of public engagement has been highly receptive to new trends in market segmentation methodologies towards identity, motivations and lifestyles.<sup>162</sup> It should be noted, however, that there is a risk of embedding unacknowledged cultural norms into the design and interpretation of the resulting segmentations.

Third, it is worth emphasising that the most significant examples of segmentation exercises in the arts, culture and heritage sector have all been undertaken by significant national organisations, such as the BBC, the Arts Council, or the National Trust. As with the first two organisations, the National Trust's customer segmentation is designed to be applied in practice by local actors, providing a common frame of reference for marketing and communications activities by myriad local properties. Furthermore, this dimension of the use of segmentation does not only have consequences for how organisations engage with 'external' publics. Again, the National Trust segmentation illustrates a more general point about the significance of the use of marketing tools such as segmentation methods in non-commercial settings: an important reason for their adoption is to provoke changes in how organisations operate internally as well as how they engage publicly. In the case of the National Trust, the segmentation exercise is credited with producing "a cultural shift" within the organisation by introducing and embedding "a new customer-focus".<sup>163</sup>

It should be re-emphasised that segmentation methods are not merely tools; they are one aspect of strategic models which have significant implications for the internal functioning of organisations adopting this repertoire of research methodologies. There is an absence of academic research examining the

significance of adopting strategic marketing strategies for the purposes of inclusive, culturally sensitive public engagement activities.

The emphasis on identity, motivations and lifestyles in the segmentation methods adopted in arts, culture and heritage sectors is part of a broader shift on how segmentation methodologies are being applied to public engagement activities. The emphasis on motivations reflects the more or less explicit influence in applied fields of marketing and public engagement of particular academic models of social psychology and personal identity. This influence is most clearly articulated in the field of 'values-modes' segmentation, which we discuss in the next section.

### iii. Segmentation in campaigning

Campaigning is an aspect of public engagement in both social marketing and in the arts, culture and heritage sectors, but it is a more general field of activity beyond these areas. Building on the discussion in the previous sub-section, this sub-section discusses the latest trends in public segmentation, with an emphasis on the development of dynamic forms of segmentation which are attuned to 'values' rather than merely attitudes or behaviours. Values-based approaches to segmentation have been applied to public engagement campaigns by organisations such as Natural England and the Worldwide Wildlife Fund.

Values-driven segmentations are also increasingly used in social marketing and non-profit sector marketing, where there is recognition that values play an important role in shaping behaviour.<sup>164</sup> For example, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) has used segmentation methods to identify the key 'markets' for biodiversity.<sup>165</sup> In this case, it is acknowledged that the segmentation approach "chosen by biodiversity communicators will inevitably vary according to the outcome they have in mind, and the data that is available. Any segmentation must be fit for its chosen purpose." The emphasis to emerge from the RSPB's communication strategy is on the importance of understanding segments in terms of attitudes, motivation, and values.

While this emphasis on values is widespread, a specific methodology called 'values-modes' segmentation has been developed which explicitly applies particular psychological models to segmentation methods. Developed by Cultural Dynamics Strategy and Marketing<sup>166</sup> and by Chris Rose of Campaign Strategy<sup>167</sup>, this approach is increasingly being applied to public engagement strategies in the campaigning sector, especially around climate change issues.

This approach to segmentation is based on the psychological theory of personal motivations developed by Abraham Maslow. On this model, populations can be segmented according to unmet psychological *needs* which are assumed to drive behaviour. The values modes approach categorizes people into twelve separate psychological groups. This psychological understanding of what motivates people is then to divide the population into three psychological motivational groups: *pioneers* (who have inner directed needs and seek an ethical basis for life); *prospectors* (who have outer directed needs, and seek psychological rewards in status, fashion, and recognition by others); and *settlers* (who have sustenance driven needs, and who are cautious, protective, and seek security). This three-way division into motivation segments implies the adoption of different models of communication in pursuit of 'behaviour change' goals. Not only does this model inform an understanding of the different reasons and stimuli to which people will respond in adopting the same behaviour, but since pioneers lead, prospectors follow, and settlers then follow them in adopting new behaviours, then it follows



that different segments are ascribed different roles in the pursuit of any given public objective:

“Prospectors are a key group not generally reached by NGO campaigns and public agency communications efforts. Attracting their support, whether overtly or indirectly, may well make a significant difference to a campaign's success but is essential if the purpose is population-wide behaviour change. Prospectors dislike being told they are doing anything wrong, fear social censure and controversy and are early adopters rather than innovators. There are ways to get them to act on social issues, for example ‘green’ subjects but they need simple choice do/don’t options which involve doing stuff better, getting ‘the right stuff’ or ‘the right’ experiences and being rewarded, not made to give something up.”<sup>168</sup>

The basic assumption behind this approach is that communications strategies should seek to align preferred behaviours with values, rather than seek to change these values.

The influence of this theory of psychological motivation is evident in other segmentations reviewed in this Research Synthesis, for example the National Trust’s segmentation of customers. The values-modes methodology is notable, however, because it is explicitly informed by and informs a critical stance towards styles of behaviour-change and social marketing led segmentation developed by organisations such as DEFRA or the Energy Savings Trust.

From this alternative perspective, information does not drive behaviour, opinions and attitudes are shaped by behaviours rather than the other way round. Even where these approaches move beyond a focus on information and explanation, promoters of values-modes segmentation argue that these approaches still start from the assumption that in order to get people to do something different it is best to understand what they already do: “Most significantly, the ‘values, attitudes and motivations’ seem to be derived from assumptions made by the researchers, or explanations given by the ‘respondents’. What this approach does not do, is to look first at motivation in order to segment populations.” From this perspective, it is necessary to start from what motivates behaviour and “not observed or claimed or self explained behaviour.”<sup>169</sup> In claiming to ‘start with people, and the motivations that drive behaviours’, this approach invests considerable degree of authority in an *a priori* theory of deeply ingrained psychological needs.

The values modes approach has been developed explicitly as resource for campaigning organisations.<sup>170</sup> It informs different strategies for different segments, depending on how different groups relate to issues. This model of audience segmentation model has been applied by political parties, by NGOs and by multinational organizations. As already indicated, it is increasingly used in public engagement campaigning around climate change and environmental issues.<sup>171</sup> We look at three examples below.

Research undertaken on behalf of *Natural England* to inform its strategy for public engagement with undersea landscapes used the values modes approach.<sup>172</sup> This segmentation involved dividing the population into the three Maslowian needs groups, each containing four of the twelve values modes, of Inner Directed, Outer Directed and Security Driven. Again, it should be emphasised this model presumes that these groupings are reflective of deep, underlying beliefs and motivations. On this basis, it is found in turn that the three segments exhibit pronounced underlying differences in their desire to protect nature. The key findings of this segmentation is that building support for, in this case, marine



conservation issues requires more than information, which is likely to be inadequate or counter-productive. Rather, an 'indirect experiential approach' is recommended, one which engages positively with people's interests and concerns.

The second usage of the values mode segmentation approach worth noting is the IPPR's research on the mainstreaming of low carbon behaviours.<sup>173</sup> This makes explicit the degree to which this approach emphasises not just a differential communication strategy, but one which accords great 'agency' in driving change to particular segments. In this example, the values modes approach is used to identify a segment of 'Now People', Again, as indicated above, these correspond to the 'prospectors' segment, the key target group identified by theorists of the values modes approach:

"Now people seek psychological rewards in status, fashion, success, and the esteem and recognition of others. They tend to have a high level of motivation to consume, and their prominent position within social circles makes them a driver of fashions and trends, meaning that they are a particularly powerful subsection of the population when it comes to determining consumption-related behaviours."<sup>174</sup>

In the IPPR report, climate change communications is seen as not having effectively engaged this segment's values and concerns, and this is presented as a major impediment to the adoption of low carbon practices.

The third example of the use of values-based segmentation is the WWF's 2010 report, *Common Cause*.<sup>175</sup> This again starts from the premise that information-led strategies misunderstand the dynamics of behaviour and action by ascribing too much authority to evidence and knowledge. It draws on social psychology and sociological research on the role of values in motivating concern for 'bigger-than-self' issues, and theories of 'framing' to translate these theories into effective communications strategies that aim to activate and strengthen 'helpful values'. From the perspective of this Research Synthesis, what is most notable about the WWF report is the degree to which it explicitly raises the ethical issues that this values-based approach to segmentation generates, and which are not touched on in the existing literature on values modes segmentation:

"It is inescapably the case that any communication or campaign will inevitably serve to convey particular values, intentionally or otherwise. Moreover, in conveying these values, the communication or campaign will help to further strengthen those values culturally. People's decisions are driven importantly by the values they hold – frequently unconsciously, and sometimes to the virtual exclusion of a rational assessment of the facts. In particular, some values provide a better source of motivation for engaging bigger-than-self problems than other values. The conjunction of these two insights – that communications and campaigns inevitably serve to strengthen particular values, and that a person's values have a profound and usually unconscious effect on the behavioural choices that they make – raises profound ethical questions".<sup>176</sup>

This is a highly relevant finding in the present context. The values modes approach to segmentation, while acknowledging the complexity of people's motivations and concerns, appeals to a particular theory of deep and underlying psychological causes. The WWF report, based on an ethics of transparency in public engagement, makes clear that this approach runs the risk of appearing 'manipulative' in so far as its application does not make clear the animating

intention of campaigns to engage with and transform people's values. This leads to a careful analysis of the strengths and limitations of market segmentation:

"Audience segmentation techniques can help here in establishing knowledge of a specific audience, such that approaches to encouraging public debate can be tailored to resonate with their needs and interests. But this must not lead to opportunism in appealing to whatever values are considered to be most important for a particular audience segment, irrespective of whether these values are helpful or not. [...] Audience segmentation however, can contribute to establishing what language and which metaphors are likely to be particularly effective in activating or strengthening helpful frames. That is, the language and metaphors needed to activate community feeling values may be very different for different audience segments – varying, for example, with cultural background or occupation".<sup>177</sup>

This is a *modest* evaluation of the potential of segmentation methods to assist in what is an *ambitious* objective, to engage with and activate 'helpful' values rather than simply reinforce existing ones. Where the focus on 'prospectors' and 'Now People' aligns communications with a particular set of values that are assumed to coincide with a particular set of people, the WWF report assumes that all audience segments will have all the values identified in psychological models. The challenge, on this understanding, is to activate certain values, rather than necessarily focus on particular segments:

"Audience segmentation models, such as those in which several government departments and large non-governmental organisations have already heavily invested, are helpful. But rather than deploying these to tailor messages to an individual's dominant values, as these are revealed by survey work, they should be used to help tailor communications to resonate with dominant aspects of a person's identity in the course of working to strengthen *helpful* frames and values."<sup>178</sup>

In this example, the effectiveness of using motivational models of segmentation which recognise the importance of values is combined with an explicit acknowledgment that using segmentation methods in public engagement is one means to *change* what people do, how they do it, and why they think what they do is important and valuable. This combination is expressed in the clear articulation of an ethics of transparency in developing public engagement strategies, one which in this case uses understandings of values to develop an inclusive image of transformation rather than a differentiating strategy that leaves in place and affirms a picture of fundamentally divided public.

## Section 5 summary

- Academic research in particular fields informs the definition of variables used in segmentation exercises, and is used to evaluate the success of segmentation exercises in helping to meet public engagement objectives.
- Segmentation methods are used in public engagement activities as part of broader strategic rationales, including behaviour change, visitor engagement, campaigning, and planning of communications.
- Investigating the strategic rationalities and purposes of public engagement that segmentation methods have been used to support can provide useful **analogies** for the different strategic purposes driving debates about public engagement and higher education.

- The use of segmentation models in public engagement activities involves complex processes of data gathering and analysis.
- The use of segmentation methods is just one part of broader strategies of generating policies, applying techniques, and designing effective interventions.
- There is an identifiable shift away from thinking about public engagement in terms of a 'deficit model' aimed at better processes of informing people about issues and choices.
- Segmentation methods are used differently in relation to fields in which the aim is to inform people about practices they might adopt in support of issues around which there is a broad positive consensus, compared to fields in which issues and objectives are either more complex or contentious, where there is likely to be more emphasis on deliberation and consultation.
- While the aim of the segmentation methods is to generate relatively stable images of public attitudes and values, the increasing emphasis on 'motivational' factors indicates that segmentation methods are primarily deployed to 'generate movement': to change people's attitudes, increase public support, alter behaviour, and overcome barriers and impediments.
- Segmentation methods are not merely 'descriptive' devices; they are normative in the sense that their design and application is always shaped by the broader purposes of public engagement strategies of which they are one aspect.
- Across different fields of public engagement, the methodological and analytical emphasis in segmentation exercise is increasingly oriented towards the development of **dynamic, motivational variables** to generate segments.
- There is relatively little academic research which seeks to understand the proliferation of segmentation methods in public engagement contexts.
- There is little academic research comparable to that emerging in management studies and marketing theory which seeks to understand the practice of segmentation in public engagement contexts.
- There is an absence of research on the role and potential of segmentation methods in supporting the public engagement objectives of the higher education sector.

# Conclusion: public segmentation and higher education

## i. From market segmentation to segmenting publics

This Research Synthesis has traced the use of segmentation methods in a variety of fields, including commercial marketing, public sector management, and a variety of third sector activities. The increasingly widespread use of segmentation methods in public engagement activities provides important insights into the ways in which concepts of 'the public', of 'public communication', and 'engagement' have developed in the UK over the last three decades in particular. This is the period in which techniques and methodologies initially developed and applied in commercial marketing have been translated into new sectors, to non-commercial activities and to public engagement activities rather than marketing *per se*. The adaptability and flexibility of segmentation methods means that this technique is used in a wide variety of strategic projects where engaging publics is an animating imperative – whether the subjects of the public are conceptualised as users, consumers, clients, or citizens. Tracking segmentation methods is therefore an effective way of mapping the diversity of purposes in which public engagement activities are deployed.

The segmentation methods used in public engagement activities today have their origins in commercial marketing strategies, and the evolution of these techniques is closely related to developments in data collection and statistical analysis. In marketing theory, there has been a widespread normative assumption that effective segmentation enhances the performance of private businesses. Leading-edge research in management studies has moved beyond this assumption, to investigate the ways in which segmentation is used in practice.

The findings of this research are relevant to public engagement professionals because it indicates that the results of applying segmentation methods are far from straightforward or predictable. Furthermore, market segmentation is primarily concerned with differentiating and discriminating between different market segments (section 3.i). The appeal of segmentation methods to organisations faced with imperatives to target and personalise public services follows from this ability to differentiate groups in terms of their needs, interests, attitudes, and values. However, public engagement is by definition also shaped by imperatives of inclusiveness and universal access, and this is a key difference between the strategic contexts in which market segmentation and public segmentation is undertaken. The degree to which market segmentation methods can be appropriately applied in non-market contexts of public engagement will, therefore, depend in large part on the degree to which professional and organisational cultures are shaped by a coherent philosophy of 'public value' (section 4.ii).

The use of segmentation methods in public engagement is indicative of broader shifts in the way in which 'engagement' is conceptualised, as well as shifts in the purposes for which public engagement pursued. In both market segmentation and public segmentation, there has been a shift away from a focus on stable demographic variables of socio-economic status; in public engagement activities, this is indicative of a move away from a one-way, deficit-model of engagement in which communications strategies focus on the provision of information to people.

The increasing use of motivational variables, which differentiate audiences and publics on the basis of values, attitudes, and dispositions marks a significant shift in the ways in which public engagement is conceptualised. On the one hand, it is indicative of a move towards models of engagement that emphasise collaboration, partnership, and co-production, to enhance mutual learning between organisations and their publics. On the other hand, it should be acknowledged that the emphasis on motivational variables in segmentation exercises, part of a wider process in which sophisticated CRM methodologies are used to manage relationships with customers, audiences, and clients, is driven by an imperative to better understand the *susceptibilities to change* which define different groupings of people. As emphasised throughout this Synthesis, the use of segmentation methods in public engagement negotiates a difficult balancing act between aiming to respect and respond to the expressed needs, interests, and desires of members of the public, and aiming to change the behaviour, practices, and values of those same people.

With this tension in mind, the key issue to emphasise from the overview of segmentation methods in public engagement activities provided by this Synthesis is that segmentations are only as good as the theory that shapes the generation of data, the identification of variables used to cluster segments, and the interpretation of the segments that result. Evidence from management studies and marketing theory suggests that professionals in the commercial sector often lack the capacity to fully understand and shape segmentation exercises; the same issue is likely to be the case in the organisational settings in which segmentation methods are used for public engagement purposes.

Segmentation methods have become increasingly common features of government-led initiatives to engage members of the public with programmes that seek to enhance the public good or deliver social benefits. The growth of social marketing is the primary vehicle through which segmentation methods have become a key feature of government policy research and strategic planning (section 5.i). The primary model of public engagement in this field is based on the idea of informing people of choices and consequences, with the aim of generating aggregate outcomes through changing individual behaviour.

Segmentation methods have also become an important feature of the public engagement activities of a number of public bodies, charities, and social enterprises. Cultural organisations such as the BBC, the Arts Council, the British Museum, or the National Trust use segmentation methods to design public engagement activities which seek to increase audience size while also enhancing the experience of cultural services. In these sectors, segmentation is used to improve targeting of marginalised audiences with the aim of improving inclusivity, but also to enhance and sustain the position of organisations operating within competitive market and non-market fields of funding and finance (section 5.ii). And in the campaigning sector (section 5.iii), segmentation methods are used to identify those groups most likely to support particular campaigns and issues, whether as donors, volunteers, or supporters. In this field, as well as in the field of green, ethical and sustainable consumerism (section 4.i), segmentation methods are used to identify particular groups of people who are considered most likely to drive forward the changes identified as necessary to deliver some public benefit or social good.

This relationship between differentiating and targeting, enabled by segmentation methods, and the achievement of public outcomes is a fundamental tension within the field of public segmentation and public engagement – the use of segmentation methods is indicative of the more or less explicit assignment of *agency* to particular groups of people – as drivers of transformation, or as

impediments to change, or objects of intervention. It is this difficult relationship, inherent in the use of segmentation methods in public engagement contexts, which requires more sustained attention be given to the ethical issues raised by the proliferation of segmentation methods in shaping the public sphere.

## Summary

- The Research Synthesis identifies existing academic and professional literature on segmentation methods, including academic management and marketing studies, critical social science, and social marketing; and professional and 'grey' literatures on the use of segmentation in a variety of fields of public engagement activity.
- The Research Synthesis outlines the key debates concerning the use of segmentation in public engagement activities. These include the shift towards using sophisticated motivational variables to identify segments; the theory/practice divide in academic literature on segmentation; and the importance of professional cultures and organisational capacities in explaining the proliferation and application of segmentation methods.
- The Research Synthesis highlights emerging trends in academic and non-academic discussions of segmentation and public engagement, including the importance of reflecting on the ethics of segmentation methods, the need for better evaluation of segmentation exercises, and the tensions between using segmentation to 'nudge' people towards change or using segmentation to engage people in 'talk' about issues and controversies.

## ii. What sort of segmentation for what sort of public engagement?

Research on the use of segmentation methods in the higher education sector is underdeveloped. The aim of this Research Synthesis has been to identify the strategic rationalities and purposes of public engagement which segmentation methods have been used to support. These models provide **analogies** for the different strategic purposes driving current debates about public engagement in higher education, thereby enabling further questions and research problems about the use of segmentation in this sector to be developed.

The assumption behind this Synthesis is that higher education is a complex field, defined by multiple and competing models of 'the public good' to which Universities and other HEIs are expected to contribute.<sup>179</sup> The public purposes of higher education might include goals of widening participation and social inclusion; contributing to economic growth through training of skilled graduates, supporting innovation, or generating intellectual property; sustaining a vibrant public culture through the dissemination of research and scholarship; contributing to the solution of public problems at local, national and global scales through understanding of disease, social inequality, or environmental processes; contributing to the economies and cultures of the localities in which HEIs are located. These and other roles played by HEIs illustrate that there are multiple 'stakeholders' who help define the public purposes of higher education – international scientific communities, private businesses, the public sector, local and national governments, global governance agencies, charities and NGOs, as well as citizens and the general public.<sup>180</sup>

As already suggested, there is no single model of public engagement in which segmentation methods are deployed, but different models are used in different sectors or in relation to particular strategic purposes. The challenges and



imperatives facing HEIs in terms of public engagement are, therefore, likely to be overlap with those shaping the public engagement strategies in a number of sectors identified in this Research Synthesis. We have located the application of segmentation tools to public engagement activities as arising from three organisational imperatives which can be identified in different combinations in different fields:

1. *Accountability*: institutions in receipt of public funding or other support or with clearly defined public roles are increasingly expected to be more open, responsive, and transparent.
2. *Efficiency*: public organisations are under increasing pressure to improve the effectiveness with which they deliver their publicly mandated remit and services, not least in terms of ensuring effective targeting, response to 'personalised' needs, and enhancing social inclusion.
3. *Legitimacy*: public institutions have an imperative to sustain close relationships with customers, clients, and audiences upon whose support they depend, as well as maintain public support for their roles and responsibilities.

An assumption of this Research Synthesis is that each of these three imperatives is operative in the higher education sector, given the complexity of the contemporary University and other HEIs as a public actor. Identifying the different ways in which segmentation tools have been deployed as part of public engagement strategies to address these concerns in other sectors is relevant to assessing potentials and limitations of segmentation for public engagement benefit in higher education.

This Research Synthesis has tracked how each of the three organisational imperatives driving the application and translation of segmentation to public engagement activities in other sectors has generated different types of professional response, practical innovation and theoretical reflection. In particular, we have identified four broad models of the strategic rationales which shape the deployment of segmentation methods in public engagement activities:

1. Segmentation tools have been used to provide *better understandings of and responses to public opinion*, by developing better understandings of what members of the public do, think, value about the activities of an organisation.
2. Segmentation tools are increasingly used in initiatives to *understand human behaviour and encourage behaviour change*.
3. Segmentation tools are used as part of efforts to generate *better understandings of the learning processes* upon which successful engagement depends. This informs the consultative and collaborative design of engagement activities which seek to enhance and extend the experience and identifications of people with particular organisations or *campaigns*.
4. Segmentation tools are used to design programmes to improve engagement with members of the public, informing the strategic *planning of communications* projects.

This Research Synthesis has illustrated that particular examples of public engagement practice will use segmentation methods for more than one of these purposes at the same time. The role of segmentation in shaping the strategic planning of communications is a common feature of the use of segmentations in different areas, and is likely to be highly relevant to the higher education sector.



The use of segmentation in behaviour change initiatives, on the other hand, is likely to be of more restricted relevance in this sector.

## Summary

- Research on the use of segmentation methods in the higher education sector is underdeveloped.
- Higher education is a complex field defined by multiple and competing models of 'the public good'.
- The challenges and imperatives of public engagement in higher education overlap with those shaping the public engagement strategies in a number of sectors identified in this Research Synthesis.
- This Research Synthesis identifies the strategic rationalities and purposes of public engagement which segmentation methods have been used to support in various sectors. These models provide analogies for the different strategic purposes driving current debates about public engagement in higher education.

### iii. Challenges of using segmentation for public engagement in Higher Education

This Research Synthesis has identified a wide range of engagement activities in which segmentation methods play some role. These range from one-way deficit models of engagement premised on providing information to people, in which the assumption is often that the attitudes or knowledge of 'the public' is an obstacle which need to be overcome in order to achieve desired 'public' benefits; much more participatory, deliberative forms of engagement that seek to consult and collaborate with people to build sustained public identification with organisations and their public purposes. The definition of public engagement in higher education used by the NCCPE emphasises the importance of mutual benefit from any engagement activity:

"Public engagement describes the many ways in which higher education institutions and their staff and students can connect and share their work with the public. Done well, it generates mutual benefit, with all parties learning from each other through sharing knowledge, expertise and skills. In the process, it can build trust, understanding and collaboration, and increase the sector's relevance to, and impact on, civil society."<sup>181</sup>

This Research Synthesis provides resources for assessing the ways in which segmentation tools might be used to enhance the various activities through which models of public engagement in higher education are implemented – activities that range from informing, to consulting, to collaborating. Key issues that arise from the use of segmentation in public engagement in other sectors are clearly relevant to higher education:

1. Understanding the opinions, values, and motivations of members of the public is a crucial feature of successful engagement. Segmentation methods can offer potential resources to help understand the complex set of interests and attitudes that the public have towards higher education.
2. There exist a number of existing segmentations which address many of the areas of activity found in Universities and HEIs. These include segmentations which inform strategic planning of communications; segmentations which inform the design of collaborative engagement

activities by Museums, Galleries, and Libraries; and segmentations that are used to identify under-represented users and consumers.

This Research Synthesis has emphasised that segmentation is, on its own, only a tool, used in different ways in different contexts. The broader strategic rationale shaping the application and design of segmentation methods is a crucial factor in determining the utility of segmentation tools. There are four issues of particular importance which emerge from the synthesis of research on segmentation in other fields which are of relevance to the higher education sector:

- Segmentation exercises are costly and technically complex. Undertaking segmentations therefore requires significant commitment of financial and professional resources by HEIs.
- The appropriate interpretation, analysis, and application of segmentation exercises also require high levels of professional capacity and expertise.
- Given 1. and 2. above, it should be acknowledged that undertaking a segmentation exercise has implications for the internal organisational operations of HEIs, not only for how they engage with external publics and stakeholders.
- Segmentation tools are adopted to inform interventions of various sorts, and specifically to differentiate and sometime discriminate between how groups of people are addressed and engaged. For HEIs, the ethical issues and reputational risks which have been identified in this Research Synthesis as endemic to the application of segmentation methods for public purposes are particularly relevant.

We close this Synthesis by identifying areas of possible future research, both into segmentation in public engagement in HEIs, and into the use of segmentation in the public sphere more broadly:

- Further research into how and why segmentation methods are translated across policy areas and professional fields.
- Further research into the practices of 'doing segmentation' in public engagement contexts, equivalent to leading-edge research on the practice of segmentation in commercial settings undertaken in management studies and marketing theory.
- Further research, assessment, and evaluation of the extent of the use of segmentation in HEIs.
- Further research and evaluation into the conceptual and methodological issues involved in using segmentation tools in public engagement activities, including research on the use and analysis of different forms of data and the implications of digitalization for the generation of sophisticated segmentations of motivations and values.
- Further research into how the applications of segmentations in public engagement activities are evaluated in practice.

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## **National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement**

The National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement's vision of a higher education sector making a vital, strategic and valued contribution to 21st-century society through its public engagement activity. We are working to help support universities to improve, value and increase the quantity and quality of their public engagement and embed it into their core practice.

The NCCPE is part of the National Beacons for Public Engagement initiative, funded by the UK Higher Education Councils, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust.

The six Beacons are university-based collaborative centres that help support, recognise, reward and build capacity for public engagement work, based in: Newcastle and Durham, Manchester, CUE East UEA, UCL, Wales and Edinburgh.